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COMMONWEAL

A Review of Religion, Politics, and Culture

May 21, 1999

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To the Editors

Dressed for life

I always appreciate Sidney Callahan's keen common sense. In her fine reflection on the Eucharist [April 23] she writes: "What we imagine, attend to, and imitate we become." In the wake of the Littleton killings we also glimpse the demonic underside of that observation.

If eucharistic celebration lies at the heart of the "Gospel of Life," it also impels us to discern the anti-eucharistic elements that pervade much of our culture. All too often our culture imagines, attends to, and imitates death not life, as that cranky and canny Catholic, Walker Percy, warned in *The Thanatos Syndrome* (a warning eerily echoed in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*).

Thus the integral celebration of the Eucharist must, of its nature, foster countercultural attitudes and dispositions, however much we celebrants may camouflage them with clouds of incense. As Callahan ponders the appropriateness of the assembly's donning the "thanks and praise garments—much like the gowns worn by Oxford scholars to signal their role as seekers after wisdom," she might incorporate Annie Dillard's suggestion regarding the headgear most suitable for the liturgy's transformative challenge: the crash helmet!

(REV.) ROBERT P. IMBELLI
Newton Centre, Mass.

Sense of the sacred

In my opinion, Sidney Callahan ["The Eucharist," April 23] has isolated a core crisis in North American Catholicism—the demystification of the Eucharist. The problem has been discussed at length and eloquently in past issues of *Commonweal*, but Callahan says it simply: The pendulum has swung too far. For many Catholics today, according to all these disturbing polls we read, the Communion event is genial and commemorative, as it is for many Protestants, but hardly an experience of the "body, blood, soul, and divinity" of Jesus himself, as our predecessors in the faith witnessed it to be. That these words embarrass us today is a sobering development, for it can persuasively be argued that much of the strength of Catholic loyalty in the past—in the face of mumbled Latin Masses and all the other issues—had to do with knowing that "Jesus is here in this church" and capable of uniquely incarnating his words from John, "I in them." These were the days when 90 percent of baptized Catholics attended Mass.

To us *Commonweal* Catholics, this line of talk can sound awfully like "restorationism," as Callahan implies. But we need to recall the words of Andrew Greeley from another recent issue of *Commonweal* [April 9], that Catholicism is a "both/and" religion. Faith in and experience of the real presence in the Eucharist does not in any inevitable way cancel our experience of each other as a sacred community, our openness to the power of Scripture, our impulse to charity and social justice, or our response to the world as a place where grace abounds. Logically, in fact, our engagement with the world stands to be strengthened by the empowering experience of Christ's presence within our very tissues. While identifying with the other "presences" of Christ just as Callahan does—congregation, Scripture, celebrant—Vatican II is at pains to privilege Christ's presence "under the species of the Eucharist." Article 7 of the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* declares the presence to abide there "most especially" (or "*par excellence*," as Callahan renders it)—"maxime *sub speciebus eucharisticis*" (emphasis added).

This would be a theological quibble if the issue of Real Presence hadn't become a central factor in contemporary Catholicism's crisis of faith. What lies behind the tidal wave of "spirituality," New Age and otherwise, is a hunger for the "sense of the sacred," that is, for contact with the *mysterium tremendum* that the church used to provide and that seems to have been largely expropriated by science and quantum cosmology, the angel craze, and by such Hollywood imaginings as *Close Encounters* and *Star Wars*. It's fine to quote Karl Rahner's phrase, "the world is a sacrament," for there's obviously truth in it. But that sound bite, in a world that runs on sound bites, can subtly disorient us. What need do we have then of the "sacrament" of church if it is merely more of the same, or in a word, redundant? Indeed, as Callahan found, sacramentality is often sensed everywhere *except* in the church. Several years ago, *America* asked two dozen or so practicing Roman Catholics to describe how they experienced God in their lives, and not one of them mentioned "in the sacrament of the Eucharist." This survey revealed just how radically the sense of the sacred has been expunged from our liturgical and devotional traditions. No wonder people are turning elsewhere.

The time has come for a reaffirmation of our eucharistic faith, and this includes a hard look at contemporary Catholicism's suspicion of beauty, awe, and silence (when was the last time your celebrant observed the "meditation after Communion" prescribed for liturgy?). The disastrous loss of adherents to mainline Protestantism—that is, to religion that's become mere "ethics with feeling"—should serve as a sad but clear warning.

JOHN DAVID
Alexandria, Va.

Uniformly mistaken

In the April 23 editorial ("The Future?"), we learn that many of today's seminarians are "theologically conser-

(Continued on page 4)

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COMMONWEAL

May 21, 1999 / Volume CXXVI, Number 10

UPFRONT

Correspondence *The Eucharist; today's seminarians, tomorrow's church; more on Catholic colleges...* 2

Editorial *Racial politics* 5

From the archives *July 17, 1992* 10

COLUMNISTS

Scientific research
Daniel Callahan
Promises that won't be kept. 6

Mind your manners
Abigail McCarthy 8

SHORT TAKES

A Serbian war hero
Claire Schaeffer-Duffy
War tightens Milosevic's grip on Serbian society. 9

Continuing the conversation
Catholic colleges: A historian and a bishop comment.
David J. O'Brien 11
John J. Leibrecht 12

ARTICLE

IS NATO'S WAR JUST?
Bruce Russett
Does war over Kosovo satisfy just-war criteria? 13

"Dear, did you order a cruise missile?"

POETRY

Vernacular
R.T. Smith 20

VERDICTS

FILM

LOCK, STOCK AND TWO SMOKING BARRELS • GO • THE MATRIX
Richard Alleva 16

ART

IN VIVID HUES
The Treasury of Saint Francis of Assisi
Patrick Jordan 18

BOOKS

Winston and Clementine
edited by Mary Soames
Molly Finn 21

Pilgrim Stories
by Nancy Louise Frey
Bernard G. Prusak 23

Manifesto of a Passionate Moderate
by Susan Haack
Mary Midgley 24

The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain
by David Cannadine
Sara Maitland 26

THE LAST WORD

A lie
Bill Meyers 31

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(Continued from page 4)

vative," making it "worrisome" that their thinking is "as uniform as their clothing." And this means that "Catholics should get ready to hear plenty about the redemptive meaning of suffering...."

It's nice to know what constitutes a hot button at *Commonweal* these days, but beyond that, I don't believe for a moment that the editors have a problem with uniform thinking: Had the seminarians been uniformly of the "We Are Church" school of thought, they would have been hailed for their open-mindedness.

As for sermons on "the redemptive meaning of suffering," I welcome them—they give me hope after reading statements like these.

WILLIAM A. DONOHUE
New York, N.Y.

The writer is president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights.

The editors reply:

Mr. Donohue is both a careless reader and a tendentious one. First, we challenge him to find one positive editorial reference in *Commonweal* to "We Are Church." Second, the editorial in question did not find theological conservatism worrisome; it found the bland uniformity of opinion among the seminarians worrisome. Bland uniformity of opinion among liberal theologians is just as bad. Equally worrisome are glib sermons on the redemptive meaning of suffering, which have too often been used in the past to excuse a certain moral complacency. But we don't doubt that Mr. Donohue welcomes such sermons. Glib is right down his alley.

Wanted: dialogue

I would like to commend your analysis of the recent article on Catholic seminarians published in the *New York Times Magazine*. Mount Saint Mary's Seminary is located in the Western Vicariate of the Archdiocese of Baltimore where I am privileged to serve as vicar bishop. While some may regard the seminary training at the Mount as a reassuring return to an earlier tradition of American Catholicism, I fear that it represents a departure from our more enduring practice of open dialogue in discerning our unfolding tradition.

A black-and-white moral universe is appealing to some, but the church recognizes the complex, nuanced realities of the modern world. The bishops and each pope since John XXIII have called the church to a creative engagement with human cultures, rather than an anxiously disengaged parochialism. We need priests who, through their life-giving example and leadership, can inspire the people of God to live the vision of a whole, just, and peaceful world. In my forty years of pastoral experience, I have found that the most effective priests are those who are comfortable with their own humanity and are open to the humanity of others. I do not question the sincerity or good faith of the Mount Saint Mary's seminarians, but I do question whether asceticism, mystical piety, and clericalism encourage priests to develop whole, integrated lives.

I encourage you to continue the dialogue on these important issues.

(MOST REV.) P. FRANCIS MURPHY
Baltimore, Md.

Voice from the future

I thought you might be interested, or at least amused, to hear from one who rather fits the stereotype of upcoming priests you outlined in your editorial [April 23], having been ordained but two years and having received my seminary formation from the Pontifical North American College in Rome. In fact, Rome did have an effect on me. I left for ordination full of zeal, high in ideals, in love with the church, and with a filial affection for Pope John Paul II. Two years later, not much has changed.

In the editorial, you expressed concern that a person like myself would find a difficult time being heard by an "educated audience and questioning laity," especially if I chose to address topics of abortion and contraception and didn't subject myself to listening to rock 'n' roll and watching "Seinfeld." As regards the latter, quite frankly I don't have time to watch "Seinfeld," and rock 'n' roll does nothing to wind me down at the end of the day. Also, I fail to appreciate how subjecting myself to these "sexually decadent and seductive" forms of entertainment will enhance my ability to preach.

Furthermore, in response to your concern about how ready people in the pews are to return to sermons on difficult moral issues, although abortion and contraception are not regular topics, my parishioners' response has

(Continued on page 28)

"Are you sure you're getting all this?"

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Racial politics

In February four white New York City policemen—members of the force's elite undercover street crimes unit—shot and killed Amadou Diallo, a West African immigrant and street peddler. Evidently the police thought that Diallo, who reportedly did not respond promptly to police orders, was reaching for a gun, when in fact he was only reaching for his wallet. In any event, he was unarmed and innocent of any crime. In a panicked reaction, possibly in response to their own ricocheting bullets, the police fired forty-one shots, striking Diallo nineteen times. The four officers have been indicted on second-degree murder charges, while both the U.S. Justice Department and the New York State attorney general extended or launched investigations into charges of police department misconduct.

Since the policemen declined to testify before the grand jury, it is still unclear exactly what happened the night of February 4. No other witnesses to the shooting have come forward. Newspaper stories report that the four officers were looking for a rapist thought responsible for more than forty assaults, and that Diallo fit the description of the suspect. All the officers involved were reported to have been utterly distraught in the wake of Diallo's death.

There was plenty of reason for grief, and, in retrospect, it would have helped if the reaction to the tragic killing among the city's political actors was as honestly grief-stricken as that of the cops involved. Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, whose extraordinary success in bringing down crime has made him a national political figure, was the first to blunder. Instead of taking the distress of the policemen as an indication that something had gone terribly wrong, the mayor remained aloof and defensive. As anger within the black community built, the mayor dismissed demonstrations over the killing as "silly," and in so doing seemed to dismiss concern about the killing as well. Having ridden into city hall on the failure of Mayor David Dinkins to respond effectively to assaults against members of the city's Jewish and Asian communities, Giuliani now appeared to turn a deaf ear to the legitimate outrage of African-Americans, a community with whom he has historically had chilly relations. In mishandling a clear case of police overreaction or worse and by seriously misreading the temper of the city in the wake of a series of alleged crimes by police, Giuliani exacerbated an already volatile situation.

First to exploit the mayor's failure was the Reverend Al Sharpton, perhaps best known for his demogogic role in the Tawana Brawley hoax. Sharpton became an "advisor" to the Diallo family, and organized weeks of demonstrations and acts of civil disobedience at police headquarters. The demonstrations soon attracted mainstream political figures, including former mayor Dinkins and Congressman Charles Rangel. Even the Reverend Floyd Flake, a Giuliani supporter and political power broker among the middle-class black population of Queens, criticized the mayor's handling of the crisis and joined Sharpton's protest, as did people of all races and religious affiliations. Clearly, Sharpton had tapped into not only public anguish over the shooting but a deeper, widespread feeling of resentment toward Giuliani and the NYPD.

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Much of that resentment can be traced to the police department's remarkably successful but inherently problematic "stop-and-frisk" policy. Under Giuliani's direction, the police have carried out an aggressive crime-prevention program aimed at taking illegal handguns off the streets. Led by the specially trained officers of the street crimes unit, the police have stopped and frisked literally tens of thousands of New Yorkers on the "reasonable suspicion" that they were carrying guns. This policy has resulted in the confiscation of thousands of weapons and undoubtedly contributed to the astonishing drop in deaths caused by guns. For example, in 1991 when Dinkins was mayor, 1,605 murders were committed with firearms in New York City. Last year, six years into Giuliani's tenure, that number dropped to 375. The greatest beneficiaries of this drop in violent crime are members of the city's minority communities, who are concentrated in the most crime-ridden areas of the city.

But such police tactics can pose a threat to constitutional liberties as well as send a seemingly racist message. Since the "stop-and-frisk" program targets high-crime areas, the vast majority of those frisked are the minority residents of those neighborhoods. While it is clear that the return of civil peace and lawfulness in minority communities were welcomed, the police failed when it came to the practice and appearance of evenhandedness. The Giuliani administration did not do enough to calculate the costs of a police presence whose recent rate of twenty-nine frisks for every one arrest was understandably resented. A policing policy that had initially helped turn around the city's seemingly intractable crime problem—in the beginning the ratio of guns confiscated to frisks implemented was much higher—continued long past the point of usefulness.

In the wake of the Diallo killing, the stop-and-frisk policy has been modified significantly. That is all to the good, and perhaps Sharpton's demonstrations should get part of the credit. But it would be a mistake to think there is a cause-and-effect relationship between the effort to get guns off the streets and the Diallo tragedy. The use of deadly force by New York police has actually gone down along with the crime rate. Last year there were fewer fatal police shootings than in any year since 1985. In fact, the use of force by the NYPD compares favorably with the record of other police departments in major cities. In other words, the Diallo killing does not appear to be the result of any systematic police brutality or racism.

In that light, the now thoroughly racialized expectations set up by Sharpton and others about the Diallo case is a cause for special concern. Under New York State law, the officers can be found not guilty if they "reasonably" believed that Diallo was going to shoot at them. In other words, given the high-crime neighborhood they were working in, the suspect they thought they were pursuing, and Diallo's own tragically miscommunicated actions, was it reasonable for the officers to think they were in danger? Even *New York Times* columnist Bob Herbert, one of the most outspoken critics of the police and mayor, thinks the murder indictments issued by the grand jury are unwarranted.

Not guilty verdicts will probably suit Sharpton's own brand of divisive racial politics just fine. But if the majority of New Yorkers sees the Diallo tragedy as a racially motivated killing that goes unpunished the city would be set back years. The race politics that now threatens to subsume the Diallo case is not good for those of any color. The revitalization of this nation's urban centers depends on getting beyond polarizing racial rhetoric to real social progress for all. A vital aspect of such progress remains the battle against crime, especially the crime that disproportionately oppresses the poor.

ETHICS WATCH

DANIEL CALLAHAN

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

Skepticism is in order

For years, and rightly so, bioethics has wrestled with the "technological imperative." The phrase has characterized the excessive use of technology at the end of life, or the rush to unnecessary tests and procedures. Did you really need that sigmoidoscopy? But there is another neglected imperative now, the research imperative.

Try a taste of it. The Nobel laureate Joshua Lederberg once said of research that "if we do not pursue new medical knowledge, the blood of those whose lives could be saved will be on our hands." Al Gore, touting the economic benefits of research, has spoken of the "sacred circle of progress and prosperity." And the present Congress, tight-fisted about welfare but exuberant about biomedical progress, gave the National Institutes of Health a 10 percent increase this year, bringing its budget to $15 billion. It is hard to argue against a highly profitable enterprise, backed by a supposed moral duty, and filled with the drama of scientific progress.

Yet increasingly the research imperative has provoked ethical controversy and, here and there, strong resistance—but so far, not enough resistance. The first struggle took place in the 1960s when, to combat the abuse of human subjects in medical research, the government established an elaborate system of institutional review boards. Many scientists of that era complained bitterly at this interference in their freedom, predicting the end of research.

That didn't happen, of course, but a series of later research initiatives provoked a series of no-less-heated debates.

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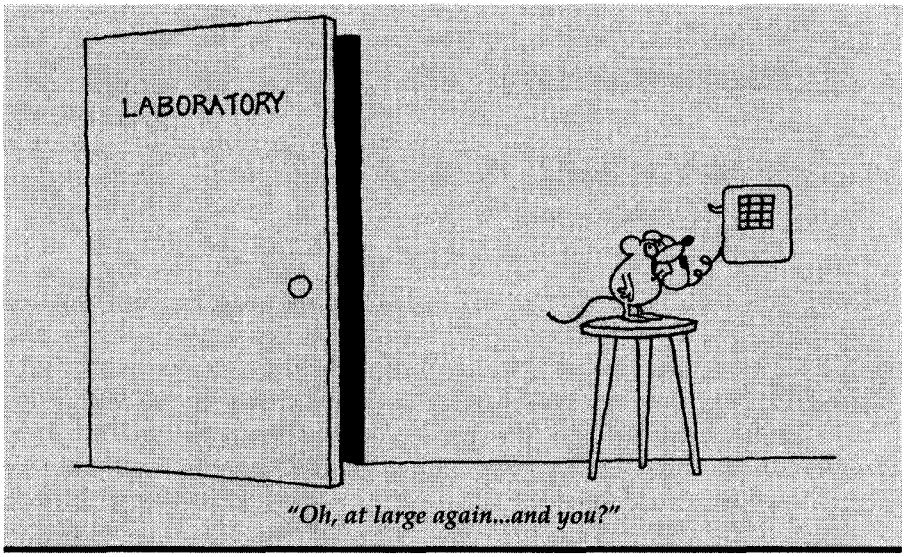
There was the struggle over fetal-cell research in the 1980s, aimed in particular at finding a cure for Parkinson's disease (and now, with some results coming in, showing fair promise of working); then a battle in the 1990s over embryo research, sought by many scientists as a possible route to the cure of cancer and infertility. More recently, the cloning debate broke out, with many calls for a ban—which has yet to happen—on research aimed at cloning a human being; and, shortly after that, still another set-to over stem-cell research, seen as a promising way into the creation of human organs and tissue. In each case, proponents of the research invoked visions of enormous gains in scientific knowledge and splendid possibilities for the relief of suffering; and the biotechnology industry could see only more dollar signs.

Many of those initiatives have provoked the ire of anti-abortion groups. Most of the fetal tissue, embryos, and embryonic stem cells would come from aborted fetuses. But other challenged research initiatives have not touched on abortion issues. The National Bioethics Advisory Commission stirred up anger among mental-health researchers when it recently called for more stringent regulation of research on the mentally ill and incompetent. Reports of schizophrenics and other seriously ill people being taken off their medications, with no informed consent, to see what would happen, is just one of many reported abuses. For some years there have been complaints about social psychologists using deception in their research, but it still goes on.

Three questions require more reflection. The first is this: Is biomedical research a moral imperative, such an overriding good that it must be pursued, and so valuable that some moral risk should be taken in its behalf? I would answer "no" to that question. It is a moral good, but not a moral duty. Call it a desirable, though optional, good. There are many other competing social and individual needs and the possible benefits of biomedicine are not necessarily greater than other goods (such as improved education, relief of poverty, job creation, and so on).



"Oh, at large again...and you?"

The second question is this: Should researchers be deferential to the values of those with moral objections to the research? More specifically, should pro-choice researchers defer to the repugnance of anti-abortion groups simply because those groups are morally offended—and defer even if they could win legislatively, as they almost surely will in our science-loving culture? I would give a hesitant "yes" in response to that question, much as I would say that those with antigay beliefs should defer to the moral convictions of homosexuals on occasion, such as with the passage of anti-hate crime laws. Serious pluralism can require deference to our neighbor's moral sensibilities.

Here is my third question: Can anything be done to tame—not to cripple, much less kill—the research imperative? Probably not much, but it is worth a try. Begin by denying that research is a moral demand, flatly rejecting such claims. Next, treat claims by scientists that some proposed research direction (for example, embryo research, research without consent) is necessary for the cure of disease as nothing other than self-interested pleading by a group that wants to go one route rather than another. Not only is there almost always more than one way to pursue medical research with targeted goals, and usually many more, there are almost always also plenty of scientists eager to get money for some other, competing line of research.

Still another step is to demand of those who want to carry out morally problematic work to bear the burden of showing that it has (1) a high probability of success; (2) that it will make a genuine contribution to human welfare, not just scientific progress; and (3) that *no other* approach can make such a claim. One of the great strengths of scientific methodology is the skepticism it brings to claims of new knowledge. It demands stringent proof. High hopes and enthusiasm don't count. The same kind of skepticism is appropriate when claims of great human benefit from controverted lines of research are put forward. Much infertility, for instance, is caused by sexually transmitted disease and late procreation, both of which are behavioral problems. Embryo research to relieve infertility medicalizes what is heavily a social problem, and one that might just as well be studied by behavioral as biomedical research.

Finally, it should be asked of all biomedical research these days what it will do to the future cost of health care. While some new technologies lower costs, most of them increase it. The reigning killer diseases are rarely cured. They are just kept a bay by expensive drugs or other technologies, as with the AZT AIDS "cocktail," as it is called, or new drugs to cope with Alzheimer's disease. Will we be better off with technologies that increasingly only the affluent can afford, and which will (and already are) wreaking havoc with health-care systems? An unpleasant question. □

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ABIGAIL McCARTHY

MIND YOUR MANNERS

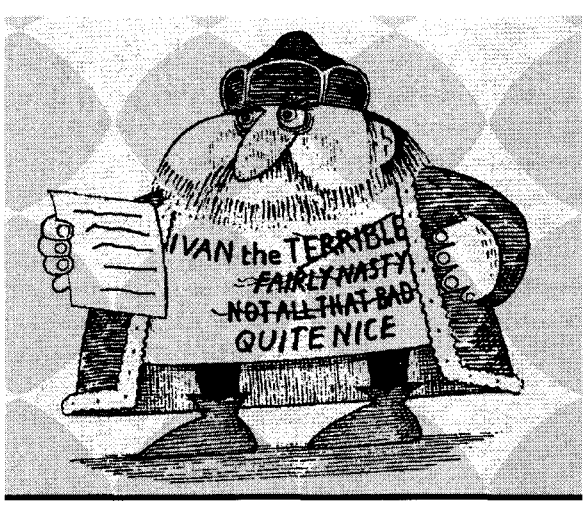
It makes civilization possible

In 1954, Bobbs-Merrill brought out Louis Kronenberger's *Company Manners*. The book was subtitled "A Cultural Inquiry into Modern American Life." In his introductory chapter, Kronenberger described the modern age as one of "*comparative courtesy*" (italics mine). He said, "...it is not what past periods have been...ages of extremely arrogant, of appallingly rude, behavior." As an example he described the eighteenth century, the so-called Augustan Age, as one that "was in general the most high-handed, quarrelsome, insulting, slanderous, straight-out downright rude age—rude to the point of being brutal, rude to the point of being cruel—that one could well conceive. In contrast, Kronenberger described his own age as one of conformity.

If Kronenberger were to write such a book today, however, he would find that his "comparative courtesy" has vanished and so has conformity. He would undoubtedly join the chorus of those alarmed about the decline of civility, a decline to what is very like his description of the Augustan Age. It has gotten so bad that it has become a subject for the comic pages. A recent Sunday comic strip by cartoonist Wiley Miller called "American Discourse" showed a hapless man saying, "Of course, that's just my opinion." In response, he is belabored and screamed at by a purse-whacking woman. Prostrate, he feebly inquires, "Whatever happened to 'I disagree'?" That well may be the general question: Whatever happened to civil disagreement?

Over half the United States Congress has, this year and last, gone on a three-day retreat in the hope of recovering civility in the nation's business. Last year's retreat cannot have been a success: otherwise this year's would not have been thought necessary. Judith Martin, the columnist who writes under the pseudonym Miss Manners, points out why many efforts at recovering civility fail. They are based, she says, on the assumption that if people get to know and like each other they will automatically behave well. This means that their legitimate differences would be brushed aside—that they would agree because of a kind of cronyism—when what they really need is to find a way to be polite when disagreeing.

True courtesy is based on cultural traditions (including eating rituals) and is safeguarded by rules based on deep principles. Above all it is based on respect for other people's feelings. One of the worst abuses of courtesy today is the tendency to make honesty an excuse for rudeness. Honesty is a virtue, true, but as Miss Manners says, it does not trump all others. It does not justify unkindness and rudeness. Whatever some people might think, it does not license them to tell others that they look awful or are stupid, etc. This attitude is compounded by those who look on tact as hypocritical, like the television personality who served her guests badly seasoned food and, after hearing their polite comments, taped their remarks when they were out of the room. What did she prove? That her guests were deceptive in being considerate of her feelings? Surely a reason for commendation, not censure.



All over the country the problem of the decline of civility is being studied in sessions like the daylong seminar on civility held at Washington's prestigious Cosmos Club, haven of the capital's intellectuals. But if civility is to be restored it will probably have to be instilled little by little from the very beginning. In an interview on "The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer," Margaret Edson, Pulitzer-winning playwright of the Broadway hit *Wit*, was asked whether her kindergarten students knew of her award. They did, she said very seriously, and because "we spend a good deal of time talking about manners and feelings, they said 'Congratulations.' I said, 'Thank you,' and they said, 'You're welcome.'" In other words, they had learned one of the most fundamental cultural traditions.

It would be better, of course, as Miss Manners has noted, if these things were learned at home rather than at school. But there are various reasons why schools have taken on the task. One of the most basic, of course, is the need to maintain order, from elementary school on, so that everyone can learn. At the college level, however, the trend goes far beyond that. In the 1960s and 1970s, under the pressure of the student revolt, colleges abandoned their role of *in loco parentis*. Now they have assumed it again under pressure from the former rebels who are now parents.

One of the new departures is the introduction of etiquette courses. According to an article by Amy Joyce in the *Washington Post* (August 2, 1998), the demand for such courses originates in the business world. Too many college graduates aren't prepared for power lunches or client dinners. "What is important in

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the business world is impressing clients," Joyce says, "or at least not making them ill with gross behavior." Cynthia Lett, a teacher of etiquette, goes further. "Nobody wants to be around a rude clod," she says. "People like to do business with people they like." So we find that Pennsylvania State University, the University of Virginia, and the University of Dayton are now among the schools offering Dining Etiquette 101. The courses may deal only with form, but they affect attitude.

Success in the business world is a powerful motive for achieving civility. So is being comfortable in the world at large—getting along with other people under as many circumstances as possible. A further reward is the fact that good manners are an effective shield against intrusiveness, vulgar curiosity, and hostile rudeness on the part of others. All are blunted by a smooth courteous response. Critic Jonathan Yardley, writing last month about Southern author Eudora Welty's ninetieth birthday, said that Welty's impeccable manners "exist not merely to put others at ease but also as a shield against invasion of the inner self" (*Washington Post*, April 19).

Civility has as many rewards as it has dimensions. Let us hope that the adoption of its forms in schools and elsewhere will bring it back and make it again a mark of our age. □

Claire Schaeffer-Duffy

A SERBIAN WAR HERO

One writer's witness

In an impassioned article for the *Boston Globe* (April 4), Randolph Ryan, a former *Globe* reporter and editorial writer who was overseeing a program for independent journalists in Belgrade, decried the NATO bombings of Yugoslavia. NATO's missiles had narrowed the operating ground for Serbia's independent thinkers, and advocates of democracy in Yugoslavia were pulling out, including Ryan himself. According to Ryan, they knew that "when the dirty work is finished in Kosovo, it will begin at home."

Unfortunately, Ryan was wrong. The "dirty work" in Belgrade began before ethnic cleansing was a *fait accompli* in Kosovo. On April 11, one week after Ryan's *Globe* report, two Belgrade assassins shot and killed Slavko Curuvija (Ch/rū'/vē/ya), a long-time Belgrade journalist and editor, and the owner and founder of the independent publications *Dnevni Telegraf* [*Daily Telegraph*] and *Evropljanin* [*European*], a news biweekly.

Although press reports have described the assassins as "unidentified," it is probable that Curuvija's murder was politically motivated. A few days before his execution, the state-controlled Belgrade daily *Politika Ekspres* denounced him by name as a "national traitor." The newspaper interpreted Curuvija's apparent silence about the NATO bombing (he was not publishing when the bombing commenced, *see* below), as indicative of his support for the Western alliance. In fact, the elegant fifty-year-old editor had repeatedly condemned NATO's actions in his public appearances.

The hunt for Belgrade's opposition journalists began in earnest last fall when NATO first threatened to bomb Yugoslavia. In October, the Serbian Ministry of Information, operating under a siege mentality, issued two directives and then passed a law prohibiting the dissemination of information from foreign media. According to Professor Eric Gordy, associate professor of sociology at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, the new law placed Serbia among the "very few countries in the world which have made access to public information from other places a criminal offense." On October 14, three newspapers, including Curuvija's *Dnevni Telegraf*, and a radio station were banned.

On October 18, Curuvija and his co-editor, Alexsandar Tijanic, wrote an open letter: "What Next, Milosevic?" in Evropljanin. The letter begins with a stinging condemnation of the state's disregard for freedom of the press, and then goes on to address "far more serious" concerns: the erosion of Serbian society. Curuvija is courageously specific in his delineation of all the political choices that contributed to the decline of his homeland. Although unsparing in his denunciations, he writes with the passion of a betrayed lover, still confident that the decision makers will leave their errant ways once the wrongs are fully revealed.

> Your Excellency, your country, your people, and your compatriots have been living for ten years in a state of fear and psychosis, with nothing but death, misery, terror, and despair around them....It is your duty, your Excellency, to immediately oppose the atmosphere of lawlessness and despair.

The letter goes on to list thirteen recommendations for restoring reason and order in Yugoslavia. Among these is the proposal that President Slobodan Milosevic promote "interethnic tolerance and include minorities in the highest political institutions."

During the Bosnian war, the staff of the Sarajevo daily *Oslobodjenje* received international acclaim for its perseverance under siege, and rightly so. Reporters sped past snipers, endured the shelling of their offices, edited articles in basements: in short, risked their lives to get the story out. Their history is testament to the age-old truth that war cannot tolerate the free flow of information.

But Curuvija and his compatriots in Belgrade faced an even more formidable foe. Snipers take breaks, tank artillery is impersonal, and the enemy "out there" can even embolden one's convictions. But the enemy within—the courts, the police, the public slander, the numbness of one's own people—is masterful at eroding the faith and clarity of the most resilient thinkers.

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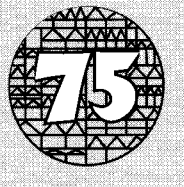
Shortly after publication of "What Next, Milosevic?" Curuvija was fined the equivalent of $230,000 for having written a text that "threatens the constitutional order." His inability and refusal to pay the fine resulted in the police breaking into the offices of *Dnevni Telegraf* to seize and destroy printing equipment and newspapers. Thus began an unrelenting pattern of fines and seizures that compelled Curuvija to relocate his publishing operation to Montenegro. His circulation in Belgrade was significantly reduced. In January of this year, Curuvija was sentenced to five months in prison for refusal to pay a fine. He was appealing the sentence at the time of his murder.

Curuvija was gunned down on Orthodox Easter as he was returning to his apartment. Milosevic's Easter ceasefire, which NATO ignored, did not apply to Curuvija. As the bombs rained down from above, the gunmen came out. They fired shots from afar to wound him, pistol-whipped his wife who witnessed the murder, and then lodged the fatal bullets into his head.

In Ignazio Silone's novel *Bread and Wine*, the protagonist Pietro Spina scrawls the messages "Down with the War" and "Long Live Liberty!" across the church steps and walls of a town called Fossa. The setting is Italy during the Mussolini era, and the midnight graffiti are Spina's act of love and resistance: a simple gesture to revive the soul of a people bowed under the Fascist state but momentarily swept up in its wartime fever. Spina uses the medium of charcoal to write words that are easily washed away with the next rain. But some messages remain indelible. Slavko Curuvija's words and life are among them. □

Claire Schaeffer-Duffy *is a member of the Saints Francis and Thérèse Catholic Worker in Worcester, Massachusetts, and writes for the* Catholic Radical. *She thanks Professor Eric Gordy of Clark University for his assistance, and Marko Kocic of Northeastern University who provided the translation for "What Next, Milosevic?"*

From the archives



Throughout 1999, Commonweal *will be celebrating its 75th anniversary. Here from the July 17, 1992 issue is an excerpt from an article titled "The Next Explosion: Kosovo in the Wings."*

The blood bath in what was Yugoslavia is, in all probability, not yet ended. Of its six former republics—Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, and Montenegro—three have already been internationally recognized: Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Macedonia, strategically placed between Serbia, Greece, and Bulgaria, is apprehensively waiting its turn, and even the little republic of Montenegro, which earlier this year voted to stand alongside the unreformed Communist Serbia in the rump of Yugoslavia, is reconsidering its options in the wake of the appalling carnage in Bosnia-Herzegovina and UN sanctions against Yugoslavia. Within Serbia itself an ethnic minefield is waiting to explode. Serbia's 2-million-strong Albanian minority boycotted the elections on May 30. These Albanians live in colonial conditions in Serbia's impoverished deep South, particularly in the province of Kosovo, where 90 percent of the population is Albanian. They also spill over into Montenegro and into adjacent Macedonia, where, numbering 700,000, they constitute about a third of the population. After Serbs and Croats, they were Yugoslavia's third largest national group, but they have never had a republic of their own.

To counter Serbian aggressive tendencies, Tito (d. 1980) granted autonomy in 1974 to two provinces within Serbia, multi-ethnic Vojvodina in the north, and Kosovo. The Serbian president, Slobodan Milosevic, rode to power in 1987 on the crest of an emotive campaign to protect the 10-percent Serbian minority in Kosovo. Although an implacable atheist, he exploited the concern of the Serbian Orthodox church. Serbs claimed that they were suffering genocide at the hands of the Albanians. However, in no way could the plight of the Serbs be compared with the desperation the ethnic Albanians felt. They had been suffering virtual martial-law rule since their 1981 demonstration for republican status within Yugoslavia. This, as the Reverend Gjerji Lush of Albania's 5-percent minority Catholic church points out, was the first popular movement for democracy in Europe after Solidarity in Poland....

With the collapse of communism in Albania, the avowed aim of Kosovar Albanians is now reunion. But communism reduced Albania to third-world status, and it is on the verge of total collapse. Kosovars, impoverished themselves, would have to make even greater sacrifices to unite with Albania. Yet it is a price they seem willing to pay. Moreover, Macedonia's restless Albanians also seem ready to secede.

The Balkan powder keg is ready to explode.

JANICE BROUN

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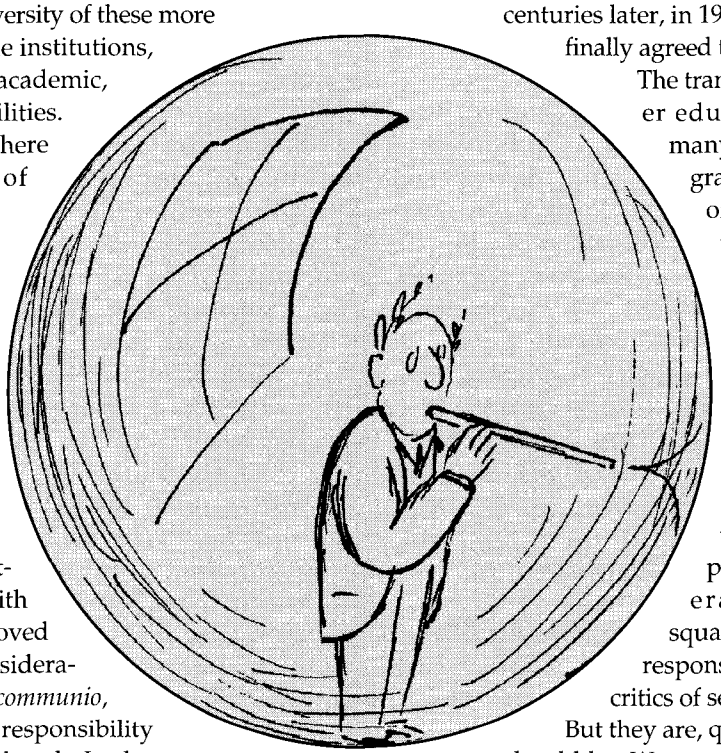
Continuing the Conversation

A historian's view Two cheers to *Commonweal* ["Keeping Colleges Catholic," April 9] for its contribution to the important debate about American Catholic higher education occasioned by proposals to implement the apostolic constitution *Ex corde ecclesiae*. I appreciated especially President John Piderit's vigorous defense of intellectual honesty when we speak of Catholic claims to truth and virtue, Francis Nichols's excellent survey of the prospects and problems of emerging Catholic studies programs, and Paul Saunders's hard-nosed reminder of what it might mean to put the proposed norms into practice. Peter Steinfels accurately shows the conflict between the goals of *Ex corde ecclesiae* and the canonical norms proposed for its implementation. His essay reflects the complexity and diversity of these more than two hundred remarkable institutions, each with its distinct mix of academic, civic, and ecclesial responsibilities.

But two cheers not three. There are some problems, three of which I would like to note.



- First, the proposed norms are recommendations of an episcopal subcommittee made in response to a Vatican request for more juridical norms than the more pastoral approach approved by the hierarchy in 1996. Readers should be reminded that after five years of extended and at times very heated discussion, the bishops with only six dissenting votes approved norms based on pastoral considerations and argued in terms of *communio*, with its suggestion of shared responsibility for the life and work of the church. In that text, canon 812 was shelved for further study, a step not taken lightly by anyone involved. Pastoral considerations blurred the edge of what has become since 1967 a chronic tension between academic integrity—which requires institutional autonomy and academic freedom—and the consistent Vatican argument that Catholic identity and integrity require formal accountability to ecclesiastical authority.

The 1996 resolution in favor of dialogue and mutual trust was not new. It has been the consistent, and I would argue inevitable, stance of responsible American bishops and academic leaders since the revolution that separated control of most Catholic colleges and universities from their sponsoring religious communities.

- Second, secularization is still the wrong word to describe what has happened to Catholic higher education. For one thing, Andrew Greeley again reminds us of how Catholic we remain, perhaps in spite of ourselves. But more important is a point that should be evident to *Commonweal* editors and readers. In 1759 young Charles Carroll of Maryland was asked by an English friend why he did not simply become an Anglican and avoid all the disabilities imposed on Catholics. Carroll might have responded that he preferred to await a Catholic restoration, so that true religion, culture, and government could once more be properly integrated. Instead he responded with a careful argument about why it was bad for religion and for civic life to make religious preference the defining criteria for citizenship and public policy. The experience of religious difference had produced in Carroll a new wisdom: When people engage in their common business, in marketplace and civic forum, and in laboratory and classroom, they must speak and act in terms of shared meanings and common values. Almost two centuries later, in 1965, Carroll's Catholic church finally agreed that yes, that was about right.

The transformation of Catholic higher education, like the arrival of many children of Catholic immigrants into the multiple centers of American culture it facilitated and reflected, did not arise from unworthy, even silly, yearnings for acceptance and respectability. On the contrary, it arose from the deepest aspirations of real men and women for economic sufficiency, social equality, cultural respect, and political participation; in short, for liberation. The many public squares for which we now share responsibility may be empty, as the critics of secularization always suggest. But they are, quite properly, ours, and they should be. We can help clothe their nakedness with meaning, in part by drawing on our own rich tradition, but we will never do that if we see the process that brought us here as simply an improper accommodation to "secular" culture.

- Finally, I fear that some of the writers come close to giving away the game by acknowledging exclusive episcopal responsibility for things Catholic. Peter Steinfels has three "requires" in one paragraph, and in the next he explores how ecclesiastical "muscle" can be held in "reserve" to balance "communication and mutual trust." I am not at all sure how we should define the relationship between the bishop and these institutions (or for that matter the relationship between the bishop and me) except in "pastoral" terms of communication, mutual trust, and shared responsibility for the life and work of the church. I think it self-evident that what our American church needs is not more

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episcopal muscle, though I yield to no one in my respect for a strong hierarchy, but more, not fewer, independent initiatives by clergy, religious, laity, and even bishops which manifest practical acceptance of responsibility for the life and work of the church. Of course we must try to "keep colleges Catholic" but their Catholic identity is not the goal. The goal is a vital and intelligent American Catholic church, and the issue here is what the editors say it is in their introduction: "the practice of Catholic intellectual life." The 1996 norms and the process of intense dialogue that produced them encourage that practice; the 1998 norms make it harder.

Might I add that the experience of Catholic higher education, and of Catholic academics wherever they work, mirrors that of this magazine. At an earlier stage of the *Ex corde* discussion, theologian Joseph A. Komonchak compared *Commonweal* and the Catholic university. Founded "to bring a distinctive Catholic voice to the public conversation," *Commonweal* has always been independent of the hierarchy but unmistakably Catholic. Komonchak ended with a good question: "Would [the bishops] like to see Catholic colleges and universities more closely resemble a typical diocesan newspaper than they do *Commonweal*?" (John P. Langan, editor, *Catholic Universities in Church and Society: A Dialogue on Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, Georgetown University Press, 1993). Sister Alice Gallin got it right in the title of her excellent monograph on separate incorporation: *Independence and a New Partnership* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1996). After a generation of expansion and change, most Catholic colleges and universities are ready for that new partnership, but it will require authentic dialogue; muscle won't help. □

David J. O'Brien *is Loyola Professor of Roman Catholic Studies, College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, Massachusetts.*

A bishop's view At their November 1998 general meeting, the Catholic bishops of the United States discussed a draft document which applies the norms of *Ex corde ecclesiae*, Pope John Paul II's 1990 apostolic constitution on Catholic institutions of higher learning, to the Catholic colleges and universities of the United States. The draft drew little attention from the media covering the event. Within a few months, however, the media turned their attention to it, but unfortunately many reports failed to reflect clearly not only what happened last November but what has been going on for the better part of a decade.

The publication of *Ex corde* provided the occasion for what has probably been the first and certainly the most sustained dialogue between the U.S. bishops and the leaders of Catholic higher education in the United States. The participants agreed that the dialogue has become necessary and has been worthwhile as well as timely.

Dialogue continues on a draft which seeks to find a way of maintaining the Catholic identity of Catholic colleges and universities within the necessary framework of "academic freedom" and "institutional autonomy" called for by *Ex corde* itself. What comprises Catholic identity in its relationship to academic freedom and institutional autonomy is an issue which inevitably occasions differing, even conflicting, analyses.

In view of academic freedom and institutional autonomy in Catholic colleges and universities, the application of *Ex corde* within the United States can in no way mean that the U.S. bishops will control these institutions. The point in question is not one of control but of relationships. Catholic colleges and universities have relationships to civil authorities, accrediting associations, academic and professional associations, athletic associations. Just as the colleges and universities have a certain form to their relationships with those entities, *Ex corde* seeks additional specific clarity on the form of their relationships to the church. That, of course, is a valid and important matter.

Earlier this month, dialogues on the draft now before Catholic institutions of higher education and the U.S. bishops prompted recommendations to the committee of bishops guiding the implementation of *Ex corde* in this country.

The media have highlighted the current draft's neuralgic language on certain points: that presidents of Catholic colleges and universities make a profession of faith and an oath of fidelity, that a majority of faculty and trustees should be "faithful Catholics," and that professors of theological disciplines are to have a "mandate" from the local bishop, even though the local bishop has no authority either to hire or to fire professors of theological disciplines because that would be interference in the internal affairs of the institutions.

Those neuralgic issues should not overshadow the consensus previously reached in past dialogues. Already agreed upon is that the relationship of Catholic colleges and universities with U.S. bishops should be based on mutual trust, cooperation, and respectful dialogue. Without that understanding, the issue of the ingredients of Catholic identity in Catholic higher education can never be constructively addressed.

After hearing from the bishops and representatives of Catholic colleges and universities, as well as from other interested parties, the committee of bishops responsible for a next draft implementing *Ex corde* in the United States will provide that draft in the early fall of this year. Discussion of and vote on that draft will take place at the November 1999 national assembly of bishops in Washington, D.C. □

The Most Reverend John J. Leibrecht *is the bishop of the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau, Missouri. He is also chairman of the U.S. bishops' implementation committee for* Ex corde ecclesiae.

For more discussion of "Keeping Colleges Catholic," Commonweal's April 9 special issue on Catholic identity, see the correspondence section, page 28.

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IS NATO'S WAR JUST?

Questions about Kosovo

Bruce Russett

The war between NATO and Serbia is, for the peoples of Kosovo, Serbia, Albania, Macedonia, and Montenegro, a devastating tragedy. On a much lower level, it is even a tragedy for the peoples and governments of the NATO countries. Save for the occasional profiteer or war hero, everyone will lose. Such words may seem to make an unambiguous case for characterizing it as an unjust war. I am inclined to that overall judgment, but not unambiguously. Nor does reaching such a judgment provide an easy answer about what to do next. Agreement rarely comes easily in international politics. But we can at least try to clarify our thinking.

Whatever their limitations, the traditional Christian standards for a just war, normative for Catholics who do not hold to an absolute renunciation of violence, present the best place to begin. The just-war principles are designed to make the resort to war difficult, but not impossible. First, does the decision to initiate the NATO bombing campaign qualify as a just war? Second, whether or not the initial decision qualifies, what about decisions now to continue the war? These two questions must be considered separately; let's start with the first, trying to apply the customary criteria to an extremely complicated situation and not expecting simple answers.

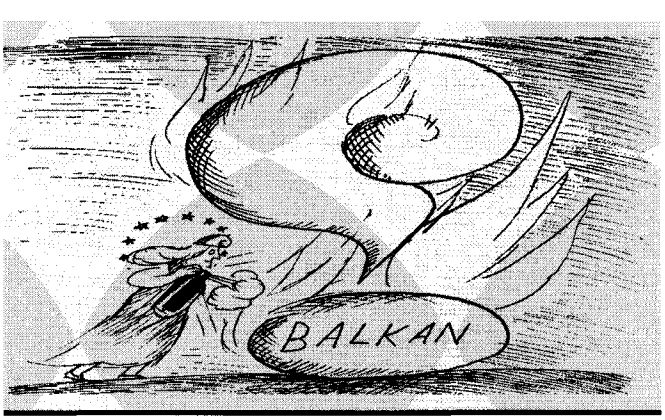
Getting in

JUST CAUSE ■ NATO's purpose was to impose a "fair" political solution on the dispute, knowing that a failure to do so could produce ethnic cleansing, mass murder, and perhaps genocide for the Albanian population. Merely imposing its own vision of a fair solution, in the case of a complex political conflict within a sovereign country, is dubious as a sufficient reason. Slobodan Milosevic, the prime mover of terror, is not alone as a terrorist. Only a few months ago the State Department harshly characterized the Kosovo Liberation Army as "terrorist." The KLA is a guerrilla organization. The classic guerrilla strategy includes terror to force the population to support it, and terror to provoke terrorist counteraction by the government. Neither side has clean hands.

Preventing humanitarian disaster provides a better reason, better the more probable the disaster is. Preventing or halting genocide provides the strongest motive. Since the signing of the genocide convention in 1948 (the United States did not ratify the convention until 1988), governments have a legal right, and by some interpretations an obligation, to intervene in another country to prevent "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, or religious group." If the term genocide is not to become so meaningless as to insult the victims of true genocide—Armenians, Jews in the Holocaust, Cambodians—this has to mean more than forcing people to move from their homes. KLA terror was not genocide.

Ethnic cleansing as practiced by Slobodan Milosevic probably is. Well before the bombing, Milosevic was known to be moving large units of troops and equipment into position to crush the KLA and to terrorize large portions of the Kosovo population into fleeing. He had perfected the techniques and shown his willingness in Bosnia. George Tenet, director of the CIA, testified before Congress in February that the Serbs would conduct a major spring offensive in Kosovo, resulting in huge refugee flows. Those who say they are "shocked, shocked" by this behavior in Kosovo are either knaves or fools.

Certainly Milosevic bears direct moral and legal responsibility for these actions. His program of ethnic cleansing would not have been so fast or overwhelming—as of early May, half the Albanian population of Kosovo had fled into neighboring countries, and hundreds of thousands more were homeless in their own country—but NATO's bombing did not cause it. It did, however, give him an incentive to do it thoroughly,



Bruce Russett *is Dean Acheson Professor of International Relations at Yale. He was principal consultant to the U.S. Catholic bishops' 1983 pastoral letter,* The Challenge of Peace.

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to create his own "final solution" to a centuries-old problem before NATO could stop him. NATO most certainly has not been able to stop him.

COMPETENT AUTHORITY ■ Nonintervention in the internal affairs of sovereign countries is a fundamental principle of international law. Action against genocide makes an exception, and a right to prevent or halt lesser humanitarian crimes is emerging. The United Nations Charter permits the Security Council to override the principle of nonintervention in case of a "threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression." As international law has evolved, a massive flow of refugees from ethnic cleansing qualifies. But China and Russia would not permit the Security Council to authorize a NATO military campaign. So NATO members decided on their own to do it. That's better than military action by a single country, but it does not carry the approval of the universal institution specifically authorized by the world to act. Should that be required?

Some analysts estimate that already the bombing has destroyed material equivalent to more than a year's worth of the Yugoslavian gross national product. People die from poverty.

DISCRIMINATION ■ Although inadvertent civilian casualties are likely in any major combat, it is never permissible to attack civilians deliberately. NATO began with high marks in this respect, reflecting the enormous change in American strategic doctrine that was impelled by the reception of the U.S. Catholic Bishops' Pastoral Letter, *The Challenge of Peace*, in 1983. The policy of not targeting civilians deliberately, but rather focusing on military equipment, bases, troops, and industry, was made explicit and fairly rigorous in the air campaign against Iraq in 1991. The same policy has been followed in Yugoslavia. It is hard to imagine the Western democracies ever again reverting to the deliberate population-targeting policies of World War II and the cold war—governments anticipate a vigorous condemnation from their own peoples. Like it or not, this is now a major constraint on democracies fighting.

PROPORTIONALITY ■ This criterion has several aspects. One arises from the recognition that civilians do die from bombings, either when bombs hit an unintended target or when civilians are in the line of fire; hundreds of Yugoslavs have died as a result. NATO has refrained, however, from attacking many military targets because there were too many civilians nearby. Conversely, Serbian military authorities have deliberately put military installations close to civilians, so as to discourage bombing. Many potential targets fall into the gray area between a tank column and an apartment house. When the Western coalition bombs bridges, electrical plants, oil refineries, and mixed vehicle factories, one may accept as sincere the claim that these are facilities essential to the enemy's military machine, or owned by government leaders. But even in the unlikely event that no civilians are killed directly when these targets are hit, the consequences for the civilian economy are dreadful. If there is no oil in the spring there will be no crops in the fall. Tens of thousands of Iraqi civilians have died, not as immediate subjects for international television, but over time. These war casualties have to be included on the scales for deciding what is proportional to the good achieved or evil prevented. Some analysts estimate that already the bombing has destroyed material equivalent to more than a year's worth of the Yugoslavian gross national product. People die from poverty.

This war, fought to prevent a humanitarian disaster among the Kosovar people who are being defended, confronts especially poignant difficulties. The refugee columns hit by mistake are the least of it. The real problem is the ethnic cleansing. Thousands of Kosovars may die from hunger and disease, despite the best efforts of relief organizations. To resettle the rest—whether in Kosovo or elsewhere—will cost many billions of dollars. NATO's choice of a military strategy that could not stop ethnic cleansing weighs into the balance of proportionality.

Troubling questions arise from the way the war is being fought to avoid casualties to NATO. High-tech aircraft and guided missiles are extremely expensive. The $6 billion the administration has asked of Congress for the war is only a down payment. But after six weeks of war, only two American or other allied soldiers had died—in a training accident. The administration has taken extreme care not to risk American airplanes and their fliers. (Not to mention, of course, its extreme aversion to a land war, where numerous American casualties would be certain.) American aircraft were not allowed to conduct the kind of low-flying ground attacks that could seriously damage Serbian combat units and avoid civilians, because of the risk that planes would be shot down. Take some hypothetical but not implausible numbers: Suppose that conducting such a campaign might have resulted in the death of as many as fifty American airmen; but also suppose that it might have saved the lives of a "mere" five thousand Kosovar refugees. This 100-to-1 ratio is conservative, and could well be 1,000-to-1. It makes an extraordinary statement about reluctance to take casualties, casualties that would be necessary to achieve what is proclaimed as NATO's central war aim.

That is, in extreme form, the way democracies fight wars. A democratic government always tries to minimize casualties on its own side (Stalin and Mao Zedong had far fewer compunctions), and does so by substituting expensive equipment for manpower. Democratic leaders who start wars that incur too many casualties are thrown out of office by the electorate, even if the wars are not actually lost. Though Vietnam seared this lesson into the minds of American lead-

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ers, the phenomenon is far more general. President Bill Clinton and other NATO leaders know it. They are implicitly making a domestic political calculation to raise the risk of not achieving their war aims so as to lower the risk of being punished for the deaths of their soldiers. Serbian soldiers and Kosovar refugees die, but Americans and Western Europeans must not.

REASONABLE CHANCE OF SUCCESS ■ Here is a bottom line: Was the decision to fight this war, in this way, taken under conditions where it could reasonably be expected to achieve its goals? Success has a thousand parents; failure is an orphan. We are beginning to see the finger-pointing which accompanies failure; almost everyone involved is holding someone else responsible. There seems to be a lot of blame to go round, with professional incompetence or inattention from bottom to top. Ultimately we will probably see a political inquiry into the muddle; meanwhile the journalistic inquiries are well underway. The following is an outline of what appears to have happened:

Intelligence estimates of whether a threat to bomb Serbia would bring capitulation were inconsistent and flip-flopping. In the Bosnian conflict, Milosevic behaved like the classic bully: retreating when confronted with the use or credible threat of force, attacking further in response to concessions. On this basis some analysts expected the threat of bombing, or perhaps a brief actual bombing campaign, to produce capitulation again. But he responded differently in the Kosovo negotiations. Bosnia was a separate country, not an integral and historic part of Serbia. The Bosnian bombing was backed up by ground forces, but virtually no one in Washington was prepared to mount a Kosovo offensive with ground troops. Nonetheless, the military warned that no bombing campaign was likely to break Milosevic's will or capacity. In January, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright prepared a new proposal that demanded more of him than did Richard Holbrooke's October plan, which Milosevic had rejected.

Wishful thinking ruled, without contingency planning. The initial NATO air forces were inadequate for a long or intense campaign; since the air strikes began, the NATO air force has had to be continually augmented, more than doubled. No serious plans were made for the use of ground troops as enforcers. Relief for the refugees has been totally improvised, without prior preparation. Milosevic knew from Iraq's Saddam Hussein what bombing could and could not do. He did not cave in to the threat of bombing, nor to its extended actuality. A land campaign may now be inevitable; if so, it will remind us more of Vietnam than the Gulf War. The Serbs have the terrain, the motivation, and an army trained and equipped from the cold war years to resist any occupier, from east or west. They had a lot of practice against the Nazis, who responded with a ruthless oppression that NATO will not match. NATO will not shoot a bunch of schoolchildren in reprisal for a guerrilla attack. So here we are, trying to muddle through.

Politics is always an uncertain business, and war is even more so. It is a test of strength—of power, will, and skill—that would not often be undertaken if both sides knew what the outcome would be. Karl von Clausewitz, the great strategist, talked about uncertainty and "the fog of war." Reasonable chance of success, like all the other criteria, cannot be applied in black-and-white terms, requiring that it always be observed to perfection. But should a reasonable person have regarded bombing as having a "reasonable chance" to succeed?

Getting out

So, maybe what was begun did not adequately meet the criteria for a just war. We could argue about that forever. Yet, if we never reached agreement, we might at least reach a clearer understanding of how to weigh the positives and negatives the next time such a choice is presented. Unless a failure in Kosovo makes us avert our eyes from every potential humanitarian disaster caused by dictatorships and ethnic hatreds, that choice will be presented to the world's superpower again. And in a war that still continues, it is not enough to debate the balance of blame. We cannot go back to the beginning of bombing, or to the months of botched preparation and the hubris of coercive diplomacy.

Americans, and those of other democracies, are in the war and responsible not just for the consequences of what has happened so far, but for the consequences of stopping or continuing. What were the vital interests that led us to the use of force? (The analogy to fighting World War II is just too facile.) We don't, and can't, act militarily on humanitarian grounds everywhere. Arguably there was a special interest here, in trying to avoid a wider war in the Balkans. Arguably there was a special interest, for a Christian world facing Islamic fundamentalism, in intervening to prevent slaughter of a Muslim population. If so, could we now simply stop the bombing, declare that Milosevic has paid a terrible price for his aggression, and go home? Milosevic would happily rub his hands, and say that creation of a Kosovo populated exclusively by Serbs was well worth the price. Will the people of Kosovo be better off if we stop? Without a tough peacekeeping force to protect them? If we continue, how do we do it? If bombing is a failure, do we have a right, or maybe an obligation, to continue the war on the ground by a strategy that gives better prospect of success? At what cost, to the Kosovars, to Serbians, to other countries in the region, and to ourselves?

We may not agree—but let's confront the tough issues, both to evaluate any settlement and to make better decisions the next time.

As for responsibility, individually we can do something for the refugees. I am asking *Commonweal* to donate my fee for this article to Catholic Relief Services, earmarked for Kosovo. The address is Box 17090, Baltimore, MD 21203. □

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Richard Alleva

COMIC NIHILISM

'Lock, Stock & Barrels,' 'Go,' 'Matrix'

Charles Dickens is alive and well and working as a casting director in the East End of London. Well, not really, but it was interesting while watching *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*—a huge hit in England and doing pretty well here—to find that a Dickensian grotesquery in the look and sound of its villains could spice a modern gangster story. But, of course, spice is most needed when the meat of a story is not of the first freshness.

Because, as far as plot goes, you might as well be watching a Frank Sinatra Rat Pack movie, such as *Robin and the Seven Hoods*. Four young lowlifes in the East End, desperate to pay off a gambling debt, snatch a pile of loot from dope dealers who are backed by Caribbean gangsters. This sets off a chain reaction of double dealings which pits all the gangs in the neighborhood against one another. This is really a black comedy about a feeding frenzy: The gangsters are sharks maddened by the scent of blood, and we get to watch them feast in a very small tank. Pauline Kael wrote of the villains of *The Maltese Falcon* that they were "so ruthless and greedy that they become comic." That's true here, too, and the comedy is abetted by writer-director Guy Ritchie's dialogue, which has a cockney pungency and wit that would do Sam Weller proud (if Sam had been a creep).

But it is really in his casting and direction of the bad guys that Ritchie is truly Dickensian. I can't remember when I've last seen such a menagerie of animal-men: here, baldness and fat and scragliness and squinty eyes become manifestations of malice. If all the killings in the final reels are bearable, it's because we feel that a race of monsters is destroying itself so that humans (the four young hoods) may survive.

But how human are the heroes?

Ritchie means for us to sympathize with them because: (1) they're more physically prepossessing than the older thugs (but who isn't?); (2) far less brutal (but, again, who isn't?); and (3) they stole out of sheer desperation instead of sheer greed (but, then again, they're in debt because of their gambling, which itself was motivated by sheer greed). Actually, don't we simply attend the fortunes of these louts because we are stuck with them as protagonists? Like all protagonists, even the vilest of antiheroes, they lead us into the story and their ups and downs give shape to the plot. But I could have cared less whether they lived or died and, in fact, I could scarcely remember their faces two hours after I left the theater, while the mugs of the old hoods have remained in my mind's eye for weeks. Though he disclaims the comparison, Ritchie has been hailed as a British Tarantino (*Pulp Fiction*) because, like the American, he uses violence for comic shock and his dialogue bops and zings. However, Tarantino's characters, though steeped in gore, can occasionally move you with their Hemingwayesque codes of loyalty and sudden accesses of compassion. Ritchie's punks stick together for no apparent reason other than they're the same age and they're used to drinking together.

The *New Yorker*'s film critic, Anthony Lane, sneered at the actor Tom Cruise for exclaiming during a screening of Ritchie's film, "This movie rocks!" But I think the remark works both as endorsement and stricture. *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* shakes you up, slaps you around, sends you out of the theater agreeably rattled. But, two hours later, you've got nothing to hum. Really good rock 'n' roll songs are hummable precisely because they do more than rock.

Lock, Stock may have bits of Tarantino sprinkled into its Dickensiana but *Go* wouldn't even exist without *Pulp Fiction* as precedent, encouragement, model, and fund-raiser. I say fund-raiser because the bigwigs at Columbia surely financed the production of John August's script with its compli-

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cated, playful plot structure only because it is a slavish imitation of the earlier crime film. So, is *Go* anything except a Tarantino epigone?

Well, let's perpetuate an oxymoron and call it a worthy epigone. August's dialogue emulates the Tarantino spritz, and I must admit that this stuff, with its easygoing obscenity, nonstop insolence, and callow, untested nihilism, sounds more plausible coming out of the mouths of *Go*'s twenty-year-old, semi-educated supermarket check-out clerks than when spoken by middle-aged, blood-drenched hit men. The three episodes that constitute the overall plot branch out from the initial situation: Ronna, desperate to raise quick cash to avoid eviction, takes over the night shift of a fellow clerk, Simon, a young limey eager to do a weekend in Vegas. (If you think check-out clerks can't come up with money to high roll in Vegas, you don't understand one particular aspect of this fantastic and ludicrous country of ours.) We then see: (1) what happens to Ronna when two guys, Adam and Zack, come to the store to buy drugs from Simon and offer Ronna big bucks to do the supplying instead; (2) what happens to Simon in Vegas; (3) what happens to Adam and Zack, who are not what they seem, after the drug deal.

The second and third stories are meant to be let's-descend-into-hell-just-for-the-fun-of-it exercises in comic nihilism. They tumble along adequately thanks to Doug Liman's direction, which is a hipper, smoother version of the kind of direction done for TV movies. But I was constantly aware of the hand of the scriptwriter ladling dollops of cynicism and violence onto a story already bursting with these elements.

In the first episode, August's writing, Liman's direction, and, especially, Sarah Polley's performance, all mesh to create a sufficiently harrowing portrait of an all-too-believable young American woman. We are never told why the evidently intelligent and (probably) educated Ronna is stuck at a dead-end job with no hope of a better one, but the all-encompassing contempt and self-contempt in Polley's eyes convince us that

her situation is real. That she impulsively takes the chance to deal drugs to make her rent and that its illegality isn't an issue at all with her, that she then leaves her best friend in the clutches of a probably violent drug dealer so that he'll trust her with a loan, that she has the wit to make a bundle at a "rave" by peddling harmless pills as Ecstasy tabs but not the nerve to scream for the police when a killer chases her since she fears the police more than any killer—all this is quite convincing in the context that the filmmakers create: a Los Angeles of quick money, fleeting thrills, foundationless friendships, no love, and affectionless sex. It's often been remarked that L.A. is a city without a center. What a perfect place for a girl like Ronna.

I believe the recent atrocity in Colorado will start a new wave of finger pointing at the entertainment industries and, as usual, works of substance will be rounded up and shoved into the same van with movies that are sheer dreck. Example of the latter: *The Matrix*. This lavishly praised sci-fi nonsense posits a world that looks and sounds just like ours but is actually controlled, indeed fabricated, by robots. But a few individuals in it are, literally, free thinkers. These get trained by guru Lawrence Fishburne to be kung fu psychic warriors who are morally justified in killing hundreds of cops because the police are unwittingly serving the establishment. Query: Didn't the Red Brigade, and other terrorists of that ilk, also believe that the Western world was "unreal" and a concoction of capitalism? And didn't this belief give them the license to kill both cops and innocent bystanders at random? Of course the whole farrago is just an excuse for good-looking Keanu Reeves and Carrie-Anne Moss to dress in glamorous leather trench coats and mow down the opposition while striking poses worthy of models in Calvin Klein ads. The special effects now drawing hosannas from the critics are actually the worst things in the film (quite an accomplishment considering Fishburne's performance) since they don't open a vista onto beauty but only pound the viewer into submission.

The teen-aged killers of Columbine High School almost certainly did not see this movie, given the time frame of events, but *The Matrix* contributes to the cloud of unreality in which the movie's target audience, male adolescents, move, an unreality that, for some, can only be dispelled by violence. □

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Patrick Jordan

IN VIVID HUES

The Treasury of Saint Francis of Assisi

Saint Francis of Assisi, a watershed saint, was one of those remarkable few who crack open the gospel in such a way that everything that follows is altered. If you think of Francesco di Bernardone (1182–1226) as a garden statue, a scriptural literalist unaware of complexity, or as a simpleton incapable of nuance, you probably know too little about him.

Francis was not much to look at (although Lawrence Cunningham says he is the most depicted of saints), but he was someone with whom subsequent centuries had to deal. His order of lay penitents, for example, spread so rapidly in Western Europe that it helped bring about the demise of feudalism, exempting as it did its members from loyalty oaths and the obligation to carry arms. As for the man's effect on a live audience, here is an eyewitness account, given by a university student who heard him in Bologna in 1222: "I saw Saint Francis preach in the marketplace in front of the courthouse, where nearly all in the town were gathered. But the beginning of his sermon was 'Angels, Men, Devils.' He now spoke so well and skillfully on these three kinds of reasonable spirits that many learned men who were present were not a little astonished to hear an unlearned man (*idiota*) speak thus. But the whole theme of his discourse was to assuage enmities and to create peace. His habit was dirty, his appearance insignificant, his face not handsome. But God gave his word such power that many noble families, between whom there was much old-time enmity and spilled blood, allowed themselves to be induced to make peace." On the seven-hundredth anniversary of Francis's death, so unique was his conformity to the gospel that Pope Pius XI called him "the Second Christ." Who compares?

Over the centuries, Francis's hometown in Umbria—the green heart of Italy—has become a locus for Christian pilgrimage. Assisi hopes to be so again during the upcoming millennial celebration. But two years ago the town was struck by a severe earthquake and the damage was considerable. In particular, the huge Basilica of Saint Francis, begun two years after the saint's death and one of the most architecturally and artistically commanding structures in Western Christendom, was rocked. The Italian government, the church, and various philanthropies are working frantically to restore it. For during the first century following Francis's death, the raising of the great double-decker church had created a veritable artists' laboratory, which in turn gave impetus to the Italian Renaissance. Giotto, Cimabue, Torriti, Lorenzetti, Simone Martini, and countless others all worked here—to perfection.

While the 1997 earthquake slowed the march of pilgrims—the lower church with the tomb of Saint Francis still welcomes them; the upper church will reopen at Christmas—a new sense of vulnerability hangs over the town. A year ago a visitor found the Church of Saint Clare bolstered by scaffolding, its famous San Damiano crucifix on view at only brief intervals.

Still, the earthquake may not have been without its benefits. A much needed retrofitting is under way for the basilica. And now a traveling exhibit is making Assisi available to those who might not otherwise get there. Various Italian institutions, the Franciscan order, and the inventive curators of New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, among others, have assembled a display of nearly seventy small masterworks from the museum adjacent to the basilica (known as the Treasury), along with thirty other period pieces gleaned from collections around the world. The exhibition, "The Treasury of Saint Francis of Assisi," benefits the basilica's restoration fund and remains in New York until June 27. It will then travel to San Francisco's Palace of the Legion of Honor, before returning home.

The exhibit consists of paintings by Italian masters such as Sassetta, Fra Angelico, and di Paolo; sculptures, reliquaries, manuscripts, weavings, and liturgical objects; and a series of large-scale color photographs that convey the grandeur of the basilica and the gravity of the recent dam-

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age. The photographs—much as a large-scale photograph of the Acropolis in an exhibit of marbles from the Parthenon—help orient the viewer and place the Treasury objects in proper perspective; for despite their beauty, the objects in the collection can't help but fail to convey the peaceful grandeur of Assisi.

Among the most impressive objects are the forty-plus paintings. The majority are small temperas on wood, and almost all deal with iconographic subjects: That is, they are rendered in such a style that both their execution and their themes inspire. While most of these works are from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, their artistic variety demonstrates the creative explosion that was taking place, attributable in part to Saint Francis's emphasis on the humanity of Christ. According to Jaroslav Pelikan, Francis's understanding of the Incarnation and Passion led to the more naturalistic art of the Italian Renaissance.

In terms of color, the most striking uses of hue in the exhibit are the blues in two sets: the largest and perhaps oldest portrait of Francis on display (*Saint Francis and Four Posthumous Miracles* by the so-called Master of the Treasury; *see* page 3); and several crucifixes with saints by a thirteenth-century Umbrian (?) artist known as the Master of the Blue Crucifixes. Of the two sets, the Francis in the miracles panel is strikingly Byzantine: A gold-leaf background makes prominent the angular saint in his blue habit. He forms the central column of the composition, flanked by two vertical blue and red arabesques. At each of the four corners of the panel is a rendition of a miracle, attributed to the saint's intercession. The central Francis holds a red, lance-like cross in one hand, a red Gospel book in the other, as the red marks of his stigmata jump out like coals. Large horizontal blue strips with gold filigree separate the upper and lower miracles, and draw the eye to the center. There is a rich sense of Byzantine pictorial practice here, but it is coupled with an exotic, inventive, almost Bonnard-like use of color.

The Master of the Blue Crucifixes—responsible for the second set—is represented by five contributions. According to the catalogue (*The Treasury of Saint Francis of Assisi*, edited by Giovanni Morello and Laurence B. Kanter, Electa, $35, 221 pp.), this unnamed thirteenth-century Umbrian (or Emilian?) artist's works were unrivaled until Duccio. The curators have diligently combined his works from the Treasury, a Madonna from a private collection, a processional cross from the Smith College collection, and two magnificent saints from the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. Each piece is worth attention.

The blue colors of the Treasury's double-sided crucifix are unforgettable, both for their intensity and for the poignancy they engender. This crucifix (*see* page 18) is similar to but smaller and less intricate than the older San Damiano cross. The latter uses reds and has an open-eyed Christ who appears to be serenely triumphant. In contrast, the blue crucifix—Jesus hangs on a cross of indigo, superimposed over a gold background;

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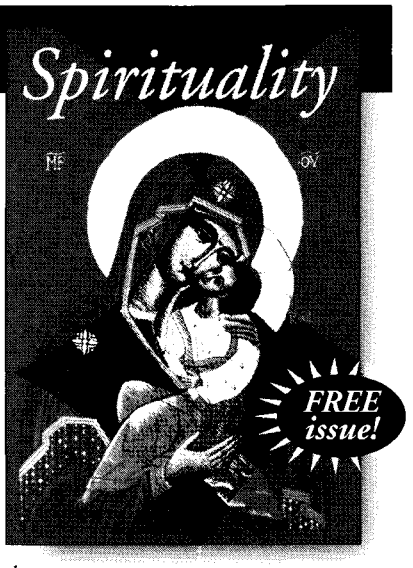

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Vernacular

It was Thoreau who wanted
to pull words up
with dirt still clinging
to the roots. He needed

to watch Latin, Sanskrit,
and Greek bleed to Saxon,
then English, green
as elm leaves or

bright as privet.
He kept a steady thirst
for sap and the crisp
snap of a tuber,

savoring equally *carrot*,
sumac, and *rhubarb* or
dew sparkling on chitin.
He told Emerson,

who was astonished
at his arrowpoint
collection, "I just reach
down, and there they

are, so many syllables
in the path." He saw
each flint as a berry
and touched it

to his tongue to know
something of flight
and the nicked
fingers that shaped it.

"Language," he would
ponder, "is the way
my tongue makes sense
of shadows,

the breath and osculum
it lives in, the way flora
orchestrate water
and obdurate soil."

He moved through
fields and woodlands
tasting radiant moss,
tickseed and meadow rue,

promising nothing odd,
crackpot or disfangled
could ever be mere
debris if you reach

down and lift it,
if you speak its savory
name precisely
in the oracular household

of the unfurling world.

R.T. Smith

his drapery and that of Mary and Saint John are blue—has a Christ whose eyes are closed in agony and whose body is whipped in pain. This crucifix is a signal example of Francis's insight into the humanity of Jesus that led to the new realism of the Renaissance.

A large John and Mary on loan from the National Gallery are more developed than the similar figures in the double-sided crucifix. Their drapery is more detailed, their faces more deeply fashioned and evocative. Mary's left hand cradles her head in anguish. Her right hand is extended toward the (now missing) figure of her crucified son. The artist has caught her at the moment when insurmountable pain overwhelms the psyche.

One of the great feats of museum sleuthing on display here is the reassemblage of a ten-part altarpiece by the so-called Master of Saint Francis. Considered the foremost Italian painter before Cimabue, this artist's two-sided screen may have originally adorned the lower church in Assisi. The Met has gathered its various far-flung elements from museums and collections around the world. Other notable paintings include Sassetta's playful and dynamic *Saint Christopher*; *The Madonna of Humility* by Lorenzo Monaco, warm though stately; Gherardo Starnina's *Saint Lawrence*, his robe a blaze of color (*see* cover); and Fra Angelico's small *Saint Anthony of Padua*, not on a par with most of his work, but not to be missed. Two figures by Pietro Lorenzetti, the Sienese master, also deserve note: his *Virgin and Child* and *Saint Margaret*. The *Margaret* (or *Cecelia*?) must have been part of a larger work. This young woman has the self-assurance of a martyr but seems not to suffer from overblown self-consciousness. Her golden hair, braided at the bottom and adorned with flowers, melds into a gold, tooled halo. Her face has a depth and soulfulness that would have been unachievable in an earlier period.

Such pieces as this allow you to forget a certain disquietude that creeps in at other points in the exhibit. This unease arises particularly before some highly decorative chalices, textiles, reliquaries, and manuscripts. How was it that members of the Franciscan order, dedicated to simplicity and eschewing property ownership, came to occupy the papal throne and to finance the great basilica in Assisi? The story is complex, but this exhibit makes it clear that some of Francis's devotees left no stone unturned to build him a monument. Francis himself had not wanted his community's churches to be opulent; he simply wanted them to be well-swept! But in his *Testament*, composed a month before his death, he had said that "above everything, I want this most holy Sacrament to be honored and venerated and reserved in places which are richly ornamented." This proved to be a needle's eye fit for a dromedary. And since Francis had a rich disposition and a keen appreciation of beauty—tonal, poetic, and visual—it is not hard to imagine that some of his followers would take him at his word and even master the art of ecclesiastical dispensation.

Such dichotomies can't be missed here: the elegant simplicity of an early Franciscan psalter rests alongside a regally illustrated missal, a gift to the Treasury from the Franciscan tertiary, Louis IX of France; a simple bronze cross that belonged to Francis's companion Giles is stationed just a few feet from the gilded and enamel chalice of the first Franciscan pope, Nicholas IV. Then there is the room of reliquaries: one to house Saint Andrew's finger, another for Saint Blaise's tooth, a third for a cord used to scourge Jesus, etc. Today, it is not easy to get one's mind around such pieces, or to dispel the antiquarian flavor they exude. We are more likely to maintain a loved one's memory by treasuring a photograph. We preserve our heroes' exploits with autographs, recorded voices, or million-dollar home-run balls. Even our saintly martyrs—Oscar Romero or Ita Ford—we are more likely to honor by recalling their words, visiting their graves, or working to further their ideals.

So this exhibit has two competing gifts: It gives rise to artistic elation and to complex feelings about a tradition that knows a great deal about both saints and dross—some of it exquisite. □

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Pug & Cat keep in touch

Winston and Clementine
The Personal Letters of the Churchills
Edited by Mary Soames
Houghton Mifflin Company, $35, 702 pp.

Molly Finn

In *Alone*, the second volume of William Manchester's three-volume biography of Winston Churchill, we are given a portrait of the great man in the flesh—"a flamboyant swashbuckler," "not only a great statesman but also...one of history's great originals." Some glimpses:

- "A sibilant rustle of Irish linen sheets breaks the hush in Churchill's bedroom...as he sits bolt upright and yanks off his black satin sleep mask."
- At Chartwell he feels free to roam around in the nude. According to one of his servants "it seems completely natural to him"...But it did not seem natural to a young housemaid who looked up the stairwell and beheld, on the top step "Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill in the buff—all 210 pounds of him, a massive pink man with a bald, smooth dome...glaring down at her like a laser beam. The girl fled the house shrieking."
- "The legend that he is a heavy drinker is quite untrue. Churchill is a sensible, if unorthodox drinker." He says of himself: "We all despise a man who gets drunk....All I can say is that I have taken more out of alcohol than alcohol has taken out of me."
- "Instead of 'Hullo,' [the Churchills utter] elementary animal sounds 'Wow-wow' or 'Miaow'... Clementine addresses her husband as 'Pug,' he calls her 'Cat.' The children are 'Puppy kitten,' 'the Chumbolly,' 'Mule' and 'Mouse.'"
- "It is eleven o'clock. Churchill sees his overnight guests to their rooms and, as they retire, begins his working day....Before the night is out, he will have dictated between 4,000 and 5,000 words. On weekends he may exceed 10,000 words....He lives like a pasha yet must support his extravagant life with his pen...the family literally lived from book to book, and from one article to the next."
- "Megalomania," Churchill says, referring to his domineering manner, "is the only form of sanity."

The Churchill captured by Manchester is not the same person you encounter in *Winston and Clementine, The Personal Letters of the Churchills*, edited by the couple's youngest daughter Mary Soames. I turned to Manchester's biography after reading *Winston and Clementine* because I needed some way of fleshing out the rather bland portraits that emerged from the letters and from the colorless continuity material provided by the editor. No expert, when I picked up this volume I knew Churchill as England's great leader during World War II, as our courageous and powerful ally, as a prodigiously prolific writer, and as a colorful public figure whose witticisms are still widely quoted. According to the stories, he spent his days in bed consuming legendary quantities of cigars, brandy, and champagne, and about him swirled stories of love affairs, black depression, and bachelor vacations on the Riviera. For a reader already well acquainted with Winston's extravagant—even outrageous—uninhibited ways, these letters probably provide many additional glimpses, per-

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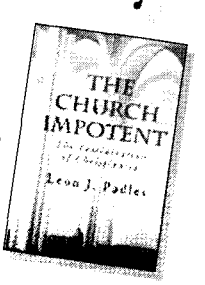

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haps even insights into his life. For those without any special preparation, however, the persons—and personalities—who wrote these letters are in danger of being swallowed up in a flood of facts for which readers have insufficient context. They may also be overwhelmed by an army of people who are often identified in footnotes by nothing more interesting than their full names, titles, dates, parentage, and marital history. Indeed, it was rewarding to return to the letters after acquainting myself more intimately with the Churchills; their letters seemed a great deal livelier and more interesting.

Their daughter has collected some 1,700 pieces of correspondence over a period of fifty-six years, starting in 1908, the year of the Churchills' marriage, and ending in 1964, a year before Winston's death. This loving pair, whose letters contain warm expressions of affection, gratitude, pet names, and silly little drawings of cats, pigs, and pugs, spent a surprising amount of time apart. They usually took separate vacations but wrote to each other almost daily. Winston wrote from his painting, writing, and gambling vacations in the south of France. As for his glamorous Riviera vacations: "I have stayed in bed every morning and made great progress with the book. We have averaged 1,500 words a day, though nominally on vacation." His biographer Manchester has an interesting take on these holidays: "...the creature comforts of the expatriate society appealed to the hedonistic streak in him; if he was well supplied with Pol Roger, fed by a great chef, and offered his choice of the best cigars, the identity of his suppliers was of little interest to him." Manchester drily adds, "He is not a born gambler. He is a born *losing* gambler."

Clementine (always "Clemmie") wrote from ski slopes, tennis courts, exotic excursions all over the globe, and during her extended recoveries from childbirth. Mary Soames notes that "in those days, for the upper classes, three weeks in bed was *de rigueur*, followed by a period of convalescence." Winston detailed his extensive work on Chartwell, the family estate, and reported on work- and war-related conferences and negotiations. Many accounts of "cures" from Clemmie chronicle her battles with unspecified illnesses, accidents, and depressions. A number of exchanges by "house post"(while they were under the same roof) reflect disagreements, often about public events, people, or situations. Clemmie felt she could make a better case on paper than in a discussion in which her resentment of Winston's "defensive obstinacy" might lead her to lose her point through exaggeration. These letters were meant to prevent furious explosions (and sometimes succeeded). Such explosions were invariably followed by affectionate expressions of penitence and regret. From Clemmie: "My Sweet and Dear Pig, when I am a withered old woman how miserable I shall be if I have disturbed your life and troubled your spirit by my temper. Do not cease to love me—I could not do without it...Good-bye my Sweet one. I want to stroke your dear Face—"

The sweep of more than half a century of letters is impressive. Winston was already over forty when he wrote from the trenches during World War I, and the view of trench warfare is both like and unlike other versions that have become familiar. Along with the filth, cold, confusion, and terror are his regular requests for and receipt of plentiful supplies of brandy and cigars, delicacies from Fortnums, a sheepskin sleeping bag, several pairs of new boots, and a warm, brown leather waistcoat.

From Clemmie in 1926: "I have seen Mussolini...he is most impressive—quite simple and natural, very dignified, has a charming smile and the most beautiful golden-brown piercing eyes....When he came in everyone (women too) got up as if he were a King....I am sure he is a very great person—I do hope nothing happens to him." And a few days later: "I have just received a beautiful signed photograph from Mussolini....All the Embassy ladies are dying of jealousy!" And Winston replies: "The description of Mussolini is very vivid. No doubt he is one of the most wonderful men of our time."

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www.commonwealmagazine.org

From Clemmie, March 1959: "My Darling, Long before you get this letter you will have heard that yesterday, when your pictures were shewn to the General Public 3,210 people visited the Exhibition....The Academy officials are wildly excited and say this is a record for a 'One Man' Show. Last year there was an exhibition of drawings by Leonardo da Vinci and 1,172 came on the opening day. Poor Leonardo!" (In the end about 100,000 people attended Winston's show.)

Winston: "If it weren't for painting, I couldn't live. I couldn't bear the strain of things."

Winston and Clementine had five children, four of whom survived into adulthood. Of these, Randolph and Sarah were serious alcoholics; Diana was a depressive who committed suicide. Of Randolph, William Manchester says, "both parents shared the responsibility for having raised a cad...." References to their children in these letters are disappointingly cool, almost detached, especially on Clemmie's part. Given what we know about their children, Winston and Clementine shared many more than the usual number of disappointments and griefs. Is their failure to give these difficulties full discussion in their letters simply the restraint of upper-class breeding? Does it reflect a detachment brought about by a life lived so largely in public? Knowing that their letters would become part of the public record, are they protecting their children—and themselves—from the judgment of future generations? Winston and Clementine were uninhibited in expressing their enduring love and affection for each other. Only their youngest child has carried into the present those qualities of steadfast devotion and faithfulness that are the most moving message of these letters. □

Molly Finn *writes from New York.*

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FOOTSORE IN GALICIA

Pilgrim Stories
On and off the Road to Santiago
Nancy Louise Frey
University of California Press, $17.95, 326 pp.

Bernard G. Prusak

Three years ago I walked 1,000 miles across France and Spain in the company of strangers. What brought us together was that we were all doing something rather strange, namely making a medieval pilgrimage to the tomb of a saint who next to nobody today believes is entombed there.

The pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in northwest Spain—to the tomb of the Apostle Saint James the Greater, son of Zebedee and brother of John—has enjoyed all kinds of strange fortunes in its twelve-hundred-year history, and the last thirty or so years have brought yet another surprising turn. As the anthropologist Nancy Louise Frey documents in her new book, the pilgrimage has been resurrected from the dead to life in a new and perplexing form. In 1996, when I was making my pilgramage, Frey reports "between 23,218 and 30,000 pilgrims made it to Santiago" by foot, bicycle, or horse. She asks two basic questions: Why people today do it, and what they're "saying about the world," explicitly or implicitly, in doing so.

To begin with the basics, Santiago is Saint James. Santiago de Compostela is a city of 87,000, about thirty-five miles from the Atlantic and fifty north of Portugal, in the region of Galicia. The pilgrimage, which many present-day pilgrims call the *Camino* or "Way," runs down through the Basque country and back up through Castile. Legend has it that the tomb of Saint James, abandoned and forgotten, was rediscovered by a hermit sometime in the ninth century. How Saint James got to northwest Spain is told by another tale, which seems to have originated in the seventh century. After Pentecost, James was sent by the Virgin Mary to preach to the Iberians. He was not, however, very successful in his mission, and also evidently not very persevering, for Acts 12:2 records his death back in Jerusalem during the persecutions of Herod Agrippa, who ruled from A.D. 41 to 44. The saint's body was subsequently translated to Spain in a stone boat.

The meaning of the pilgrimage today is not any simpler than the legends about its origins, but here is where Frey's book is helpful. As she remarks, "pilgrims frequently have a difficult time explaining why they are making the pilgrimage"; not the least reason is that there are so many different and conflicting answers to this question. Frey gives order to this cacophony. Some talk of the pilgrimage's historical interest, say, its role in the development of the concept of Europe. Others won't stop talking about the pilgrimage's symbolism. Still others won't talk at all, because they're afraid of what other pilgrims might say or think, because they don't know what they themselves think, or because they couldn't care less what motivates other pilgrims and don't want to hear about it. The pilgrimage brings people together, but it also drives people apart.

Frey makes this point somewhat clumsily: "The pilgrimage is a 'realm of competing discourses' in which each person's life-world (personal, social, cultural, etc.) influences what he or she finds, values, criticizes, or rejects." She further argues that the meaning of the pilgrimage is constructed, deconstructed, reconstructed along the way. "Motives...change over the course of the *Camino*," she writes, as pilgrims struggle with the question of what they're doing and why. Motives change because, for many, the pilgrimage takes on a life of its own. Walking the five hundred or so miles from the Pyrenees generally takes between four and ten weeks. During this time and across this space (mountains and plains and mountains again), suffering of some kind—physical or psychic or both—is for most people inevitable. But the pilgrimage also builds people up in ways they had not expected.

"Enjoy your mile."

Frey suggests that the "wish for transformation" may be what most draws people to the pilgrimage. In this wish she further discerns both a "critique of modern society" and the deeper meaning of the pilgrimage's reanimation. "I call the modern pilgrimage a journey of the suffering soul," writes Frey. As she understands it, the reanimation of the pilgrimage bespeaks "an unspoken lack" and a need to escape the "disheartening aspects of modern society," among others the domination of technology and the breakdown of community. (Here it may be worth noting that, though pilgrims come from far and wide, the pilgrimage is on the whole

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a middle-class phenomenon. It does not cost a lot to do, but does require the privileges of free time and spare cash.)

This argument is not, however, adequately developed. *Pilgrim Stories* gives the reader much information, but it is unduly repetitive. Also, the writing is sometimes ungainly, even unintentionally comic. ("How," Frey asks, "do you say good-bye to a man whose presence made your ovaries pitch and turn one night simply by being in the next bed?") But the biggest stumbling block is theoretical. Frey discusses at length (and several times over) what she calls the "cult of authenticity," the struggle over what makes an *echt* pilgrim. She is generally critical of this struggle, and rightly so, for it is often at once silly and destructive. Yet the rejection of authenticity leaves Frey in a bind. She wants to speak of the meaning of the pilgrimage, but she is suspicious of claims to authority. The upshot is that she goes back and forth between making judgments and decrying judgmentalism. On the one hand, she is willing to criticize a Dutch pilgrim who rejects the free meal offered by the Hostal de los Reyos Católicos in Santiago. His assessment of the meal was that it was fit not for a pilgrim, but for a dog. Frey gives the reader to understand that, rather than "reject the gift as inadequate," the Dutch pilgrim should have "recognize[d] it as such." (I ate that meal: his assessment of it was correct.) "The *Camino* gave him an opportunity to apply his accumulated knowledge and new sensibility"—to be an *echt* pilgrim—but he did not take it. Yet, on the other hand, Frey observes that "there are many types of pilgrims, many ways of going, and many ways to interpret what it means"—which is less than helpful. She further writes that the *Camino* provides the opportunity to develop "a personal metaphysics." Ugh!

It would be a mistake, though, to give frustration the last word. A pilgrim asked her, Frey writes, to "tell us about ourselves," and this she does better than anybody I have read in the gigantic body of literature on the pilgrimage. □

Bernard G. Prusak *is a graduate student in philosophy at Boston University.*

Manifesto of a Passionate Moderate

Susan Haack

University of Chicago Press, $22.50, 212 pp.

Mary Midgley

This is a good book, which might perhaps have had a better title: *In Defense of Truth*. Philosopher and logician Susan Haack does passionately seek a middle position between absurd extremes on a number of questions. But her central passion concerns, as the blurb puts it, "whether there is such a thing as truth, whether there is a real difference between knowledge and propaganda," particularly in the case of science. This is, of course, a current battlefield. As she says: "The Old Deferentialists, taking the rationality of science for granted, assumed that there must be a uniquely rational method of enquiry exclusive to the sciences; the New Cynics, noticing the failure of efforts to articulate what that uniquely rational method is, conclude that science is not a rational enterprise, in fact, that the whole idea of an objectively better- or worse-conducted enquiry is ideological humbug. Neither the Old Deferentialism nor the New Cynicism will do."

Well, no. After all, we have known for a long time that science is not infallible or unique in the way that Descartes hoped. It is not obvious why this startling discovery should now force us to ditch the whole concept of truth. But the ideological Law of Pendulums, by which every action must have an equal and opposite reaction, does (it seems) require this. Accordingly, a genuine recognition of the way in which social backgrounds affect science has been inflated into the claim that this background is the whole picture. Inquiry thus becomes simply social interaction; there is no real quest for scientific or philosophical truth.

Haack's main business in this book is, then, to examine and explode this current truth-phobia in the writings of various thinkers, above all of perhaps America's most widely read philosopher, Richard Rorty. Like everyone who takes these positions, Rorty oscillates between being a quite reasonable Jekyll, making useful statements about particular relativities, and a Hyde who pours out vertiginous, paradoxical generalities. With the reverent care of a naturalist, Haack collects specimens of Hyde at work: "'Justification' is a social phenomenon rather than a transaction between 'the knowing subject' and 'reality.'...We understand knowledge when we understand the social justification of belief; and thus have

"I know it looks big, but it'll shrink when I wash it."

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no need to view it as accuracy of representation....I do not have much use for notions like 'objective truth.'...Truth is entirely a matter of solidarity....Nominalists like myself...see language as just human beings using marks and noises to get what they want....[To call a statement true] is just to give it a rhetorical pat on the back....*'Truth' is whatever can overcome all conversational objections.* [The pragmatist] drops the notion of truth as correspondence with reality" [emphasis mine].

Haack points out interestingly how often flamboyant rhetoric alone is left to do the work of discrediting the concept attacked. Most of these remarks come from a particularly hilarious chapter where she ingeniously intersperses Rorty's remarks with quotes from the founder of pragmatism, Charles Pierce, so as to form a continuous argument which shows how totally Pierce rejected these extreme positions. For Pierce, genuine inquiry consists in "diligent inquiry into truth for truth's sake," and the effect of sham inquiry "is that men come to look on reasoning as purely decorative." Since Rorty and his school often claimed to be pragmatists, this is interesting in itself. But it raises, too, a wider question about the literary approaches to philosophizing of Rorty and others.

Pierce wrote, "I desire to rescue the good ship Philosophy from the hands of lawless rovers of the sea of literature." Rorty, by contrast, declares that: "Philosophy is best seen as a kind of writing. It is delimited, as in any literary genre, not by form or matter but by tradition....Literature has now displaced religion, science, and philosophy as the presiding discipline of our culture....A philosopher like myself thinks of himself as auxiliary to the poet rather than to the physicist."

But why be auxiliary to either? And what does *literature* now mean? Rorty seems still so obsessed by the Old Deferentialists' exalted view of science as the only rational form of thought, that he can see no role for philosophy outside science except in a kind of literature which is so thought-free as not to aim at truth at all. Still more oddly, however, he classifies science too as "one genre of literature." Reasonably, Haack comments: "The idea of chemistry or astrophysics as genres of literature is nothing short of laughable... (though they are, to be sure, kinds of writing, as are bus timetables, and *could* be read as one reads literature—as one might notice happy alliterations and rhymes in the bus schedule)...."

That, however, evidently isn't the most natural way of reading them. Rorty's reduction stretches the idea of literature so far that it must either become empty or mean something very strange. What he wants it to mean is of course something called *irony*, in the current sense of a detached or slightly frivolous mood, an abstention from taking anything quite seriously.

Real irony, however, is not a bit like this. Real irony is not a mood but a mode of expression, an indirect language used to give extra force to what can be a deadly serious meaning, as in *Erewhon* and *Gulliver's Travels* and Swift's *Modest Proposal*. Astrophysics is meant seriously. So are bus tickets, moral judgments, and a good deal of literature. They all aim at truth—not just persuading people—even though they are often found to be mistaken. Indeed, the possibility of mistakes is itself the strongest testimony to the importance of a strong concept of truth, a concept independent of conversational tactics. Without that strong concept, we could not speak properly of falsehood, error, or lying. How then could we describe the world?

Of course there are real problems about truth and reality, especially in science. Haack maps this awkward country skillfully for those professionally involved in exploring it, devising a balanced and convincing form of critical realism. But she also writes clearly, forcefully, and funnily, shooting down a lot of academic nonsense which is a serious nuisance to the general reader, and for that we are all in her debt. □

Mary Midgley *is the author of* Can't We Make Moral Judgments? *among other books.*

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The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain
David Cannadine
Columbia University Press, $29.95, 274 pp

Sara Maitland

It is terribly difficult to explain to Americans the problem (I do think it is a problem) of class in Britain. British social reality is actually different. We still have hereditary political power and social prestige. Present plans to abolish the voting privileges of the hereditary peers do not propose abolishing titles, which will remain influential (charities and businesses still seek out titled individuals to confer prestige upon their enterprises). Paradoxically, at the same time the discourses of socialism have never had the sinister applications that they have acquired in the United States. A language of "class" persists within the political process. Moreover, class as a question of style, of representation, and language, at every level, has been annexed to, and reinforces, the social reality.

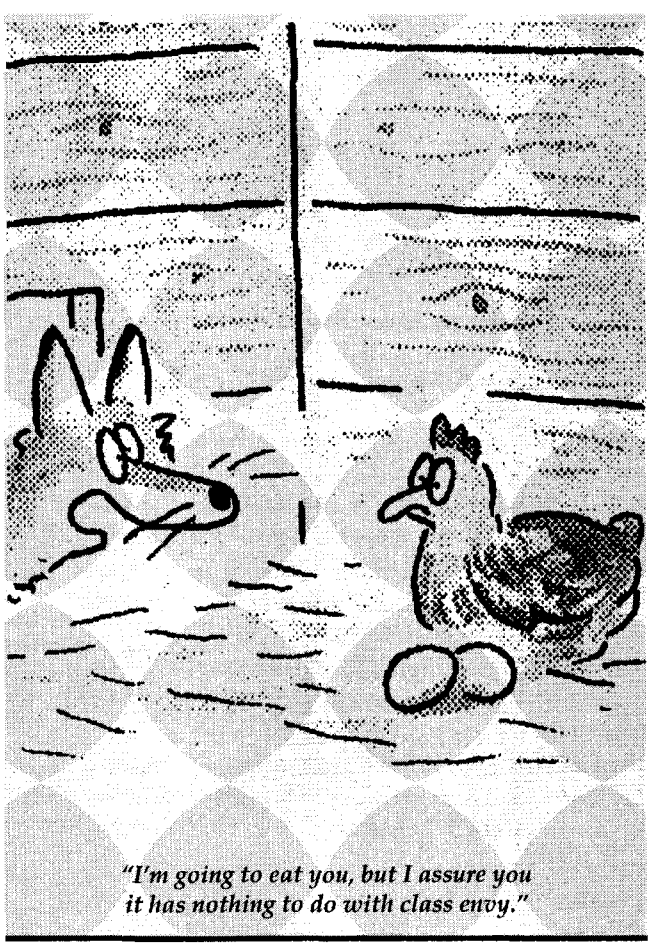
David Cannadine quotes Lord Beaverbrook saying that in America "the only difference between the rich and the poor is that the rich have more money." This is not true in Britain. There is a whole language and social structure that separates wealth from class, and creates a set of complex nuances around social status. And, because of the legacy of the empire, even race does not entirely escape these distinctions—Indian aristocrats educated at Eton are more Etonian than Indian, for instance.

Although it is common to describe Britain as class "obsessed," I don't think it is helpful. If obsession suggests a continuous anxiety and engagement with a subject, it is no more true to say the British are class obsessed than it is to say we are "breathing obsessed." We all breathe and we all, in language and in actions, address class on a daily basis—from what plants we choose to grow in our gardens to how we think politically.

Cannadine's admirably well-written account of the development of the language of class over the last three centuries should therefore prove extremely useful in the United States. He sees class as a rhetorical device reflecting not a simple social reality, but a set of perceptions about how society is constituted. These perceptions are available for manipulation and social construction, and have been so used for the last three centuries. For example, there was not any measurable "middle-class triumph" in the mid-nineteenth century, there was merely a new perception that power should lie with the bourgeoisie. These sets of perceptions have proved enduring and effective precisely because they are vague and inaccurate.

Cannadine argues—and I am convinced he's right—that British life has three particular understandings of class. First, there is a hierarchical continuum, based on every individual having a place slightly above or slightly below her neighbor; a ladder with a rung for everyone from monarch to beggar. This understanding of class as a classification implies that there are no true points of disjuncture or division. Second, there is a binary opposition between the working class and the upper class: Them and Us, the classic Marxist model. And finally there is a three-part model of lower, middle, and upper class. All three models can be presented from different angles: the middle class is virtuous; the aristocracy understands; the workers are the heroes. Or the reverse. Different models gain supremacy at different points in history, but the other two continue to lurk and inform. "The class consciousness of the majority of the people is characterized by its complexity, ambivalence, and occasional contradictions," Cannadine writes. "It does not reflect a rigorously consistent interpretation of the world."

Cannadine is less helpful when looking at precisely where and why people shift from one model to another. Looking at my own class consciousness afresh in the light



"I'm going to eat you, but I assure you it has nothing to do with class envy."

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of his definitions, I realize that I do use all three models, but under quite specific circumstances. With Marx, I believe that the interests of labor (of the working class) are inevitably in competition with the interests of capital. At this grand scale I believe in the binary model. The failure of the working class to identify with this analysis does not change my conviction.

In terms of social policy, however, I am more inclined to use the tripartite scheme that includes the very rich (new and old), the seriously poor, and a middle class made up of everyone in between, including certain skilled workers and large branches of the "professions." This is the way I look at social exclusion, education, housing policy, welfare distribution and tax burden, and similar issues.

In my personal tastes and my social and community networks, I use a professional and hierarchical model. It isn't quite a ladder, more a bell graph, and subconsciously I am at the center. My mother, for example, still believes that it is possible as well as desirable to seat people at her dinner table "correctly," knowing who should take precedence over whom, despite the extremely narrow social range of people she would invite to dinner. I fear that I exercise similar sorts of judgments, even though in my own social circles I do not need that precise social skill.

Class prejudices are still a serious problem in Britain. Whether or not it is possible to change this should concern anyone interested in justice and in the best use of talent. I doubt it can happen unless we abolish all hereditary privilege, plus the Public School system. But there is clearly no political will for that at present. In the meantime, Cannadine's clarity, lively writing, and depth of reading (nearly one-quarter of the book is references) is immensely helpful in explaining the phenomenon of class and making readers aware of their own history and language of identity and representation. □

Sara Maitland, *a frequent contributor, is the author of* Angel Makers: The Collected Stories *(Holt).*

75 COMMONWEAL

1999 marks Commonweal's 75th year of publication. We invite you, dear readers, without whom this milestone would never have been reached, to celebrate with us.

Here is some of what we're planning—

The Crisis of Liberal Catholicism
A Commonweal Forum
Loyola University's Watertower Campus
Chicago, October 6, 1999, 1:00–4:30 P.M.
Speakers: CARDINAL FRANCIS GEORGE & PETER STEINFELS
Respondents (list in formation): JOHN NOONAN, JOHN MCGREEVY, E.J. DIONNE, JR. & others

The 75th Anniversary Celebration
Featuring ALICE MCDERMOTT, author of
Charming Billy, That Night, At Weddings & Wakes
and winner of the National Book Award for fiction
An evening in New York in late fall (date and time to be announced).

And coming this fall from Touchstone Books (Simon & Schuster)
Commonweal Confronts the Century
Liberal Convictions, Catholic Tradition
An Anthology with selections from 75 years of Commonweal,
including Richard Alleva, Joseph Bernardin, Daniel Berrigan, Sidney Callahan, Willa Cather, John Cogley, Dorothy Day, Jean Bethke Elshtain, James Finn, Graham Greene, Elizabeth Johnson, Leon Kass, Walter Kerr, Jacques Maritain, Jo McGowan, Thomas Merton, Reinhold Niebuhr, & many, many others.

Stay tuned for more news....

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(Continued from page 4)

been overwhelmingly positive on the occasions I have addressed them. Far from approaching these concerns to scold my parishioners, I have been able to "intellectually engage and transform" my parishioners on these topics. It seems a little-known fact that the church's moral teachings are not meant to be punitive or burdensome, but are promulgated to guide people toward true fulfillment in their daily life. You spoke of the importance of freedom of conscience, but a conscience is only free to choose when it is properly informed. The church, as a mother, has always been concerned with helping to form the consciences of her children and has entrusted this duty to her priests.

My love for the church is paralleled and complemented by the love I bear for my parishioners, so that I am compelled to reveal the beauty of the church's teachings to them. So do not be too quick to judge us young clergy. The church has certainly contributed to making the world a more human place, but Jesus' invitation to "deny yourself, pick up your cross and follow me" (Luke 9:23) will always be countercultural. Given that the modern world would never encourage such radical behavior, perhaps a "retreat from the modern world" is just what is needed to get on the right path.

(REV.) WAYNE SATTLER
Bismarck, N. Dak.

Reality check

As a Vatican II-generation priest, I was glad to learn I was not alone in feeling despondent after reading the *New York Times Magazine* article on seminarians. In fairness, this article was about only one seminary and three representative students interviewed, but I fear they represent many more. Amid their preoccupations with Roman collars and people's reactions, wedding rings, chalices, married couples "contracepting," feel-good files certifying their worth and their fantasies of heaven, I missed a passion for social justice, compassion for disenfranchised Catholics, concern about women in the church, a realistic appreciation of the relationship between sexual orientation and mature celibacy, and an awareness of the importance of laity as church. The seminarians' perception of confession and their role of judging sins and giving correct penances is far from Vatican II's renewal of the communal aspect of reconciliation and the role of confessor as physician and healer.

I admire their dedication, commitment, and emphasis on prayer and preaching. I admire their willingness to stand against the culture for the truth, but their unnuanced equation of truth with "what the church is saying" is revealing. While knowing that "the church will triumph" might console them, I suspect it will only reinforce their feeling of men standing apart. I hope they do not stand so far apart that they lose touch with reality.

(REV.) ROBERT NUGENT, S.D.S.
Baltimore, Md.

Room for the spirit

Your recent editorial regarding the Mount Saint Mary's seminarians is startling in its judgmentalness. You question the validity of the seminarians' vocations by noting that the distance "traveled from obedient, rule-following careerist to obedient, rule-following seminarian is not that great."

Surely the starting point of a conversion is not abandonment of one's personality and temperament, but orienting these toward Christ. The seminarians cannot be faulted for being made of the same "psychic stuff" both before and after they entered the seminary.

But your real lack of charity is the failure to grant that the seminarians are on a spiritual journey, of which Mount Saint Mary's is just a starting point. We cannot predict how these men will grow, but we should at least give them the benefit of the doubt that they will. Didn't Thomas Merton grow as time progressed? Certainly Oscar Romero did. Isn't the Holy Spirit involved here somewhere?

I might also remind you that freedom of conscience, that fundamental Christian value, requires that the conscience be properly formed. To accomplish this requires consideration of more than one perspective, perhaps even a few of the "ahistorical truths" taught at Mount Saint Mary's.

JOHN MULREANY
Elmhurst, N.Y.

Required reading

The April 9 issue of *Commonweal* with its special supplement on *Ex corde ecclesiae* was excellent. Next November our hierarchy must decide where to look first, to Rome or to our schools. If there is a compromise, I cannot imagine what it might be. Issues of principle, academic freedom, canon law, etc., apart, the civil legalities alone—as outlined by Paul Saunders—are enough to caution our bishops about which choice to make. I wonder how many of them will have read this issue of *Commonweal* by the time they have gone to Washington in November.

(REV.) GEORGE F. WERNER
Edgewood, N.Mex.

Moratorium "with muscle"

Commonweal has again surpassed itself [April 9]. Peter Steinfels and John Cavadini clearly distinguish between the need to reassert and define Catholic identity on the campus (especially in the wake of the 1960s and 1970s "silliness" so well graphed by Andrew Greeley), and the canonical controversy provoked by the papal letter's juridical concerns, which, in turn, can cause the unforeseen civil-law disasters outlined by Paul Saunders.

Although I feel "Catholic studies" as opposed to Catholic theology is a subdivision of anthropology, I accept Steinfels's admonition that Catholic identity on campus can come in a variety of models. In that spirit, I pray the U.S. bishops adopt a five-year moratorium on the canonical question as Cavadini urges, so that "with muscle" bishops and college administrators develop strategies, courses, and opportunities to reaffirm a higher education tradition that is both academi-

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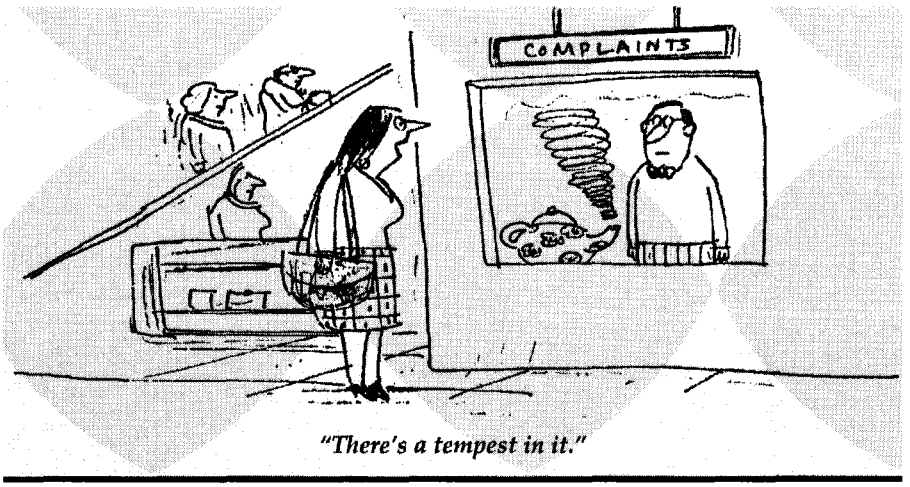
cally excellent and profoundly Catholic. At the end of the moratorium period, a reassessment of the situation can be made. Let the energies be directed to producing models in the concrete campuses of various types and traditions; enough time and anguish have been spent on canonical rules, and not enough on reversing secularization and promoting a dynamic Christian presence in academia.

FRANK. C. ARRICALE
Bayside, N.Y.



"There's a tempest in it."

Prior restraint

As a graduate of a Jesuit university, I can appreciate the difficulty of maintaining both a Catholic identity and academic integrity. But certainly the "juridical" control the Vatican is demanding cannot take the form of a prior restraint upon thinking and publishing.

If Stephen Tempier, bishop of Paris in Thomas Aquinas's day, had had the power to impose a prior restraint on the work of scholars, much of the work of the church's greatest philosopher might never have been produced. According to G.K. Chesterton in his biography of Thomas, Bishop Tempier "thought that admiring Aristotle was a weakness likely to be followed by adoring Apollo."

No college that accepts the notion of prior restraints juridically imposed can command respect. Rather, I would endorse Peter Steinfels's suggestion: Start with "a definition of Catholic identity" and establish "benchmarks for measuring how [colleges] are living up to that definition." As Steinfels points out, "bishops always retain the prerogative of unilaterally announcing that a college or university" can no longer be "considered distinctly Catholic." But such a sanction would be a last resort, and, as Steinfels says, procedures could be devised to assure that it will be used only "rarely and responsibly."

GEORGE E. WARD
Plymouth, Mich.

Periodic solution

Re: "Keeping Colleges Catholic." Every American college goes through a periodic review by its accrediting agency. Catholic colleges might enhance this process with a review of their Catholic identity by the establishment of goals, self-study, review by outside experts, and on implementation schedule. If the local ordinary received a copy of the report, the canonical element would be satisfied, and the cloud of mistrust would be blown away.

JOHN FAHEY
Copperopolis, Calif.

Greeley's best

As a *Commonweal* reader who doesn't like to admit that he goes all the way back to the editorship of John Cogley, I think your recent "Keeping Colleges Catholic" is the most arresting and topical issue I've ever read. All the articles were superb, but Andrew Greeley's was Andrew Greeley at his best—wry, witty, caustic, and full of hope.

J. MURRAY ELWOOD
Strafford, Pa.

Thin faith at Notre Dame

Though I agree with Andrew Greeley [April 9] that Notre Dame students have an emotional attachment to the Grotto and to dorm Masses, I am constantly surprised by their ignorance of the most basic points of Christian doctrine, church history, the saints, liturgy, and traditional Catholic piety. Although I do not teach theology, I regularly have to explain doctrines or define terms because they come up in our readings and no one knows what they mean. In just the past two weeks I have had to explain the Angelus, mortal sin, and Easter duty.

When the students talk about those dorm Masses, they say things like, "I only like going to Mass in my dorm because there the homily is geared to us, and all my friends are there and I feel close to them." Or, "I hate Mass in my parish church because of all the dumb, boring ritual." One wonders just what their theology of the Eucharist is.

What do they know? They know that the pre-Vatican II church was horrible, that Mass then was muttered in some foreign gibberish and the congregation didn't "participate." They know that priests should be allowed to marry, women should be ordained, natural family planning is a joke, and the church is cruel to gays and lesbians. The theologians at Notre Dame rightly insist that it isn't their job to do catechesis and apologetics, but we have this unusual configuration where students may know Karl Rahner but not the catechism. How does one do advanced studies without knowing the basics?

Greeley insists that Notre Dame students like being Catholic, but I hear a surprising number say or write in their papers comments such as, "I don't go to Mass," "My roommate is an atheist," "I've been to confession twice in my life," and "What is an encyclical?" I sense that many of my students who are holding onto their Catholic faith are confused, struggling hard to make it a coherent and strong center for their lives, and finding little intellectual support for it. They find

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"I tried to get to the shops but cloud cover prevented me from reaching my target."

emotional support in the dorm Masses and inspiration in service work, but little philosophical or intellectual support for Catholicism.

Greeley's reference to Notre Dame as a "Catholic theme park" is perhaps more accurate than he knows. The Mississippi River at Disneyland looks deep but in fact is pretty shallow—only a couple of feet. The Matterhorn you sled down is pasteboard, held up by scaffolding, hollow inside. Touchdown Jesus, the Grotto, and the Golden Dome are testimonies to the faith of earlier generations of Holy Cross priests and their students, but not necessarily to that of most of the current faculty or students. Those earlier Catholic faculty members were candid about the fact that they were evangelizing, catechizing, and proselytizing. They believed the immortal souls of their students were at stake. Maybe we do not. MARIAN E. CROWE

Notre Dame, Ind.

The writer is an adjunct assistant professor in the arts and letters core course at Notre Dame.

Lessons from Germany

All the authors of "Keeping Colleges Catholic" condemned any juridical ties between the church and the university. This would end academic freedom, imperil federal aid, etc.

Could we not take a lesson from Germany? When Hans Küng's mandate was withdrawn he continued to teach at Tübingen, a state university; he merely transferred to a non-Catholic chair in the religion department.

An honorable compromise would be that no faculty member would lose a job as a result of theological dissent. Theology professors would, like Küng, merely move to the religious studies department. This would accomplish a juridical tie with minimal impact on academic freedom. It would cost money, but isn't Catholic identity and academic freedom worth it? (REV.) ROBERT HYDE

Whitney Point, N.Y.

Good vision

Congratulations, and thanks, for the vision and good work that went into the special section on keeping colleges Catholic. DAVID MUNROE

Montgomery, Ohio

Widen your lens

As faculty members in a Catholic institution of higher education, teaching in a theological department whose student body is highly ecumenical and quite pluralistic, we were very appreciative of the insightful articles dealing with *Ex corde ecclesiae* and its proposed norms. However, we felt a certain deficiency in your presentation. We work among a student body that is largely female, largely African-American, and represents a variety of Christian traditions. These factors raise some additional questions that were not included in your special issue. In the future, we suggest that such perspectives find their way into your otherwise quite comprehensive explorations. ANTHONY KOSNICK

ANNALIESE SINNOT

Detroit, Mich.

The writers are, respectively, director and associate director of the pastoral ministry department at Marygrove College.

Poverty amid plenty

Skip Barry ["Homeless at Fifty-five," April 23] has it exactly right: "Washington and state governments need to step up efforts to insure that the rewards of a growing economy are more equitably distributed."

NETWORK, a Catholic social-justice lobby, has just released the results of its three-year effort to track the outcome of the Welfare Reform Act of 1996. As part of the study, a statistical survey was distributed in ten states to fifty-nine Catholic social-service facilities with heavy caseloads of people eligible for AFDC. The study is one of the few that have followed people dropped from the public-assistance rolls. Key findings show that poverty continues as people receive less government assistance, and that a staggering 35 million people live in poverty at the same time that segments of the nation's people enjoy unparalleled economic prosperity. For the complete report, "Poverty amid Plenty," see NETWORK at HYPERLINK http://www.networklobby.org.

ANNE LAURANCE

Washington, D.C.

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A LIE

Bill Meyers

Twenty years ago I struck a boy and lied about it. He was black and I was white; he, a high school student; I, a college graduate. He was expelled and I went on for a doctorate. He was African and I, American.

It is the *hubris* of the former Peace Corps volunteer to believe that one who has not survived a two-year stint in some remote corner of the third world has missed out on a basic life experience. For the young volunteer, the Peace Corps can be a harsh, prolonged initiation into adulthood. Along the way there are setbacks and regression. Hitting a boy and covering it up was certainly my low point.

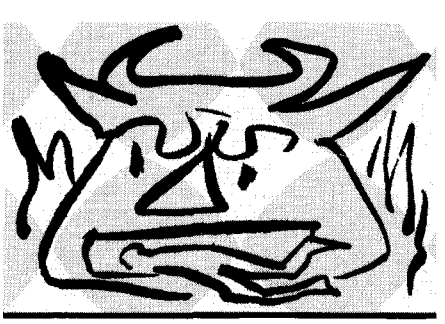
Corporal punishment was common in the schools of Niger, a former French colony in the poverty-stricken Sahel region of West-Central Africa. African teachers often resorted to physical rebuke when their charges posed exceptional problems of discipline or dimwittedness. We enlightened Americans, of course, were initially horrified by such retrograde pedagogy. Gradually, however, we adapted to local conditions and procedures.

Eight months into my assignment at a high school, I too was resorting to the severe practices of my Nigérien counterparts. In a first instance, I had one student slap an obstreperous other; another time, I myself thwacked a habitual troublemaker. This second episode both surprised and scared me, for the blow made the boy's head hit his desk with a dangerously loud thump. Yet not for a moment did he lose his silly, challenging grin.

These were exceptional incidents. For the most part my students were good kids and eager learners. As any teacher will tell you, though, it's the few insolent ones who get under your skin. And skin was the basis of the taunts that maddened me. For a white to understand the plight of blacks in America it is helpful to live in the West African bush for a couple of years.

Anasara! *Anasara*! went the cry, as I walked in town or strolled through the market, "White man! White man!" It was not only the mocking tone that I heard in the hoot that boiled my blood but the literal meaning of the word: "Christian, man of Nazareth." At first, unaccustomed to thinking of myself in terms of skin color, and not being Christian, I took the jeers in stride. When little children played by darting out of a corner, yelling *Anasara* and running away in delighted fright, I might accommodate their game by pretending to chase them. When old men and women would call out *Anasara* and wave to me in the marketplace, I'd rationalize that they didn't mean to be obnoxious and just didn't know how to hail a foreigner except by his religion and color. But when students screamed out *Anasara* at the top of their lungs, that was another story entirely.

As school let out one day a couple of students started in with the "*Anasara, Anasara*" chants, then headed down a side street. I took a parallel lane, surprising them as they turned a corner. "*Vous êtes dans quelle classe?*" I demanded of the bigger one. "Whose class are you in? What is your name?" He refused to answer and defiantly turned to walk away. The series of events that followed has haunted me.



The next day, the assistant principal in charge of discipline summoned the rogue. No sooner had I mentioned that after I tried to restrain him the boy hit me, the assistant principal began raining his own blows on the student. But our head principal pooh-poohed my demand for disciplinary action against the student, dismissing the incident as "a town matter." I insisted on my right to call a staff meeting. There the other teachers backed me up and voted to expel the boy. As he left the grounds after learning of the decision, he stopped in front of my class and threatened me.

The following day the school PTA converged *en masse* at the school and requested that we reconsider. "Allah will punish the boy," declared their spokesman. "We even intended to beat the boy in front of Monsieur Bill's home but Monsieur Bill was not there to witness it....'If someone asks forgiveness,'" he concluded, invoking a local saying, "'you must forgive him.'"

I responded by giving a little speech in French. "It is not I alone who is aggrieved," I said. "It is as if this boy has struck every teacher present here. And where is the remorse of this boy, who threatens me again after his expulsion?" We voted again. Not a single teacher changed his initial stand. The boy was expelled.

In Niger, tribal scars of identification are common. The Peace Corps imparts mental scars of maturation. Mine include this little secret: When the boy refused to divulge his identity and started to walk away from me on that dusty streetcorner, it was I who landed the first blow. □

Bill Meyers *teaches in the department of political science at Northeastern University in Boston.*

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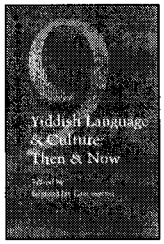

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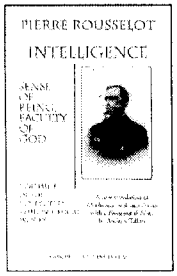

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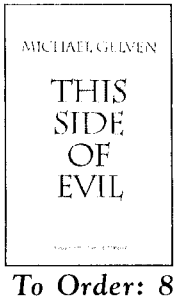

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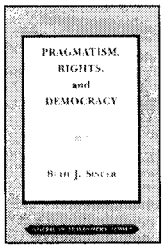

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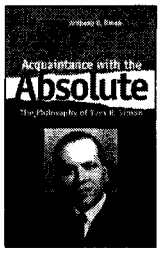

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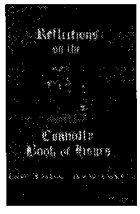

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